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Volume 3 Prologue “Mahiru and Shinya”

The first time Shinya was allowed to meet his fiancée was when he was 10 years old. It was indeed a strange feeling to have your fiancée and your life’s partner be chosen for you at the mere age of 10, but Shinya remembered his heart beating from the excitement when he found out that he was finally allowed to meet her. The girl – his fiancée – what is she like? Is she cute? Is she kind? Will the two of them be able to get along well?

To say ‘such sweet thoughts resembling love did not float around in his head’ would be a lie. He thought of them. Of a happy future. Of fun times with his lover. Such dreams filled his mind.

“……”

But, with that being said, these dreams were not going to make his heart pound and throb. After all, an intense feeling of love for a girl he had never met before – this kind of thing doesn’t really happen.

Rather, there was another reason for his heart beating and pounding.

There was another reason for his excitement.

He was allowed to meet his fiancée – when he heard that, what shook him was this sort of feeling: “…Ah, I lived, I survived without dying.”

Ten years old.

By the time he had reached that age, he had already killed several times. Those who he killed were in the same boat as him. Fiancé candidates of Hiiragi Mahiru, young lady of the Hiiragi house. Fiancé candidates to eventually mate with Hiiragi Mahiru and to provide another child with excellent and superior DNA for the Hiiragis.

This selection process began when Shinya was 5 years old. In the beginning, though, the process was neither cruel nor harsh.

Are you a fast runner?

Are you a fast learner?

Are you gifted with talents in spells (jujutsu)?

Shinya attended one of the few kindergartens in the nation that were run by “Mikado no Oni”, a religious cult led by the Hiiragi family. Among many kindergarteners, he was chosen to be part of a select team comprised of children gifted with talent. At first, Shinya was simply, truly, and purely happy. He was more talented than others. He was superior to others. Remarkable. Excellent child. *Very* excellent child. By being told so every day, his heart was beating with anticipation of how he would become even better and would defeat the other children. His pleasure came from learning and remembering many spells and from training his body. But one day, the headmaster told him,

“Shinya-kun has been a very hard worker and is an excellent student. As such, the main house has called you up to Tokyo! Great job! You are transferring to Tokyo tomorrow, so be prepared!”

And from that day, he was not allowed to go back to his home. He heard that his parents would receive 300 million yen from the Hiiragis, and that their rank within “Mikado no Oni” would rise several steps. He heard that his parents were *ecstatic* that they were commended by the main house. But, he was also told that he was no longer allowed to meet his parents, ever again. Shinya cried, yelled, and said he hated this, didn’t want any of this, but no adult would listen to him. Rather, they said that this was an honor. They said don’t say selfish things. But his life from then on was extremely harsh and cruel.

Tokyo.

Shibuya.

Once he was transferred to the facility there, he no longer had any time to cry. In the test held once every three months, you were disposed if you didn’t make the top 30%.

In the competition held once every year, where killing each other was allowed, you were disposed if you didn’t win.

If you don’t win, you die.

If you don’t win, you die.

If you don’t win, you die.

Moreover, one and only one person can survive.

He no longer rememberd how many people were there at the start.

He just desperately tried every day.

To learn new sorcery spells (jujutsu).

To learn new illusion spells (genjutsu).

To obtain new physical abilities (taijutsu).

Once every now and then, he befriended someone. A friend to celebrate their survival together.

But that friend got disposed for not being in the top 30%.

That instilled fear in everyone, and they all put in more effort than ever.

Met a friend.

That friend died.

Met a friend.

That friend died.

He stopped befriending others.

Regardless, many people were disposed.

He remembered that he began to smile indiscreetly in order to deal with the extreme stress. Perhaps this was the best option. He began to learn spells faster than those who just began to shut up, or than those who were angry all the time. Smiling made life efficient. More so, there were times when his opponent would self-destruct from getting pissed over his smiling face.

He desperately survived with indiscreet smiles. Opponents became stronger, and battles became painfully difficult, but he smiled and survived with desperation.

"……"

Then one day, when he went to the training facility, he saw no more familiar faces left other than his own. An extremely old man, who introduced himself as an instructor from the Hiiragi family, who yelled and shouted at him and the others just until yesterday, suddenly bowed to him with respect, and said,

"Congratulations, Hiiragi Shinya-sama. At last, you were chosen to be Mahiru-sama's fiancé."

He was called a Hiiragi.

The name of the main house – the name that led the religious sect "Mikado no Oni", whose rules and teachings Shinya had been following – was now a part of his own name.

Even the instructor's attitude was completely different from before. It seemed as if

the instructor truly respected, no, feared Shinya.

To what the instructor said, Shinya replied while smiling.

“Then, I don’t have to compete anymore?”

“Yes”

“I survived?”

“Yes”

“Ah. I did…”

At first, he did not feel anything special. It was too sudden. Competing with others had become a routine, a part of his life, and he was unable to react properly.

But the instructor continued,

“And quite soon, Shinya-sama’s fiancée, Mahiru-sama, will be visiting here. It was Mahiru-sama’s request to do so. It seems that Mahiru-sama holds a great interest for Shinya-sama.”

“……”

“We dearly wish that the meeting of the two future pillars of the Hiiragi family would be a wonderful experience.”

Having said that, the instructor excused himself.

Shinya was left alone in the empty training facility. He was told that he’d meet his fiancée here. He’d meet his fiancée here, where endless bloodbaths took place. Only after being told so, Shinya finally began to feel it.

That, he survived.

He thought the endless bloodbath would continue on for eternity. But he finally survived.

At the same time, a girl appeared at the entrance of the training facility, which was some distance away from Shinya. In a corner of his mind, a very small one, these thoughts poured in.

What kind of a girl is his fiancée?

Is she cute?

Is she kind?

“……”

Mahiru came closer.

Her looks exceeded all and every one of Shinya’s imaginations that he ever had.

Long, sparkling ashen hair. Dignified eyes filled with strong determination. Clear white skin, almost transparent. Elegant, calm, yet ice-cold voice ringed,

“So, you are the one who survived to plant your seeds within me?”

Shinya lowered his head. *[TL note: Shinya uses extremely polite speech here on]*

“Yes. First time at your service.”

“Your name is…?”

“My name is Shinya.”

“Shinya… and how would your name be written in kanji?”

“It is written like deep (Fukai, 深い) night (yoru, 夜).”

“That’s an uncommon one.”

“Is that so? I wasn’t aware of it.”

After all, he was here since the age of five. He had no time to think about such things. But being told that, it did seem that his name *[TL note: Shinya written as 深夜]* was indeed an uncommon name. With a smile, Shinya looked at Mahiru and said,

“But, to a person who will live under the shadow of “Mahiru”-sama, who radiates like a sun, I think it is a fitting name.” *[TL note: Mahiru means noon]*

But, once Mahiru heard that, her face showed a tint of disgust.

“That’s a rather servile way of putting it.”

It seemed that Mahiru disliked this approach. But Shinya needed to be well-liked by her. The only reason why he was possible to exist at this moment was due to his status as Mahiru’s fiancé.

And, Mahiru at least took some interest in him and came here to meet Shinya in

person. Then, right here, Shinya needed to impress Mahiru. So Shinya thought. What kind of attitude does she want from him? What type of guys does she prefer?

Smiling, Shinya probed for answers.

“I am extremely sorry. I just found out that I survived through, so I am unsure of how I should treat a person from Hiiragi family…”

But, Mahiru cut his words and spoke.

“I do not hold any interest in you, so just be yourself.”

Shinya looked at Mahiru’s face. Shinya observed and looked for what kind of expression she was making, what thoughts filled her mind.

She was a Hiiragi.

From the moment she was born, she was a god to the followers of “Mikado no Oni”. Surely, she was sick and tired of people trying to suck up to her.

Then, it was probably better to impress her in a different manner –

But, as if cutting off such thoughts, Mahiru spoke.

“I already have a person I love. Therefore, I cannot accept you. Today, I came to tell you this.”

So, it seemed like that was the reality.

Shinya looked at Mahiru.

“……”

He did not let out a word. Careless words were dangerous. Mahiru said that she would not choose him. But if that was the case, Shinya no longer held any value. And up until yesterday, everyone who lost and no longer held any value was disposed of.

But Mahiru continued her story as if she read what Shinya was thinking.

“Ah, don’t be afraid to speak freely. I made sure there was no surveillance.”

Shinya answered. *[TL note: from here on, Shinya no longer addresses Mahiru using the polite speech]*

“I can’t trust that.” (そんなの、信用できないね)

Upon his answer, Mahiru smiled a little.

“Is that the way you talk? Then, please continue that way.”

“Is this what you prefer?”

“Well, yes. But I still would not fall in love with you.”

“Hmm? That’s problematic. I survived only for that reason.”

“That’s too bad.”

“You can’t fall in love with me?” (僕じゃ、だめなの?)

Upon his answer, Mahiru once again smiled a little.

“Can or cannot aside, today is the first time we are meeting.”

“Then there’s still a chance…”

But, that was immediately rejected.

“There is no chance.”

Mahiru spoke those words in a tranquil way, yet at the same time, Shinya was able to feel a strong determination in her voice that would not allow for any objections.

Then, that meant,

“Today, I am going to be killed…”

Mahiru shook her head.

“No. I am going to pretend that we are going out, that I took a liking to you.”

At her words, Shinya thought things over. Why was Mahiru doing this? What reason was there for Mahiru to come meet him? The answer came out quickly. Shinya spoke.

“So, that means that the person you love was not allowed by the Hiiragi family.”

As if she was surprised a little, Mahiru’s eyes grew bigger. Mahiru spoke.

“As expected, you are smart.”

“So you chose me to be a cover-up.”

Mahiru smiled. As if just the thought of the person she loves made her happy, her

face glowed with brightness.

“So, that’s it. I was wondering what kind of a person you would be since I heard you were from the Hiiragi house, but you are just a young lady in love.”

Mahiru laughed.

“Yes. I am just a young lady in love, born to a house that does not allow a person to love normally.”

“You call *yourself* a young lady?”

“Ahaha. I wish I was born a normal child.”

“……”

“In a house, that would allow me to love whoever I loved.”

That - wishing to be born as a normal child - was the same for Shinya himself.

Kill others to survive.

Get disposed if you fail to produce a quality result.

He did not want to live while fighting against such fears.

Mahiru looked at Shinya and spoke.

“But, you too. Aren’t you happy that you don’t have to court and go out with a person you don’t even like?”

To that, Shinya answered.

“If it’s with a lovely girl like you, Mahiru-sama…”

“No need to flatter me.”

Mahiru cut his words, but Shinya continued while smiling.

“I’m not flattering you. You really are pretty. And to be told that I will never attain your love – even if I was uninterested until now, I’m starting to want that a little.”

“……”

“After all, I had never lost before.”

Shinya pointed at where they were, this training facility, where he was forced to compete with others for survival since the age of 5.

Mahiru smiled a little.

“You’re right. Because if you lost, you would have been disposed.”

“Therefore, I am content with being a cover-up for you, at least for now. Then I will attain your heart. Yes. Let’s do that. I’ll make that my next goal.”

But, still smiling, Mahiru stared at Shinya with a look of pity and said,

“Then, would you like to lose for once, right here?”

“Eh?”

“If you lost for once, would you no longer be obsessed with that?”

“What are you sa…”

But Mahiru was already moving straight in his direction.

Her movement was crisp, but not fast.

Shinya opened his eyes halfway, looked at her direction, and said,

“This is a Hiiragi?”

He could feel his heart cooling down in a heartbeat. We were forced to risk our lives for a person who could only move like this? Shinya could feel himself quickly lose his interest and desire for her.

Mahiru raised her fist. It was easy to stop her. A person with her level of skill would have been disposed of a long, long time ago.

Shinya raised his hand.

Shinya grabbed Mahiru’s hand.

No, grabbed, he thought.

Mahiru disappeared in front of his eyes.

It was an illusion.

Someone poked his back.

A voice flowed through his ears.

“Aha, plant your seeds in me, being at *this* level? You wouldn’t even be able to touch me.”

She was on another level.

She was on another level from the guys he competed with until yesterday.

She was not an opponent he could take lightly.

He cursed his foolishness.

There probably was a paper talisman with spells conjured stuck on his back.

And, Mahiru spoke quietly,

“Explode.”

At the same time, Shinya moved. He moved with all his strength. He attached a paper talisman of his own to counter the spells and tried to minimize the damage.

He took a step forward and turned around.

Mahiru was smiling. Mahiru was smiling sadly.

He could not find any cracks in her.

He felt a different kind of pressure this time.

Her and Shinya. Who would be the stronger one?

Probably. Most likely.

“Well, so this time, I guess it’s my loss?”

Mahiru smiled.

“Is this your first loss? If so, you’d become stronger from now on,” she said.

But to that, Shinya smiled and said,

“No. At this point, by being here, I already had lost a long time ago.”

From the moment his parents sold him.

From the moment he could not run away.

From the moment he could not reject the engagement.

From the moment he could no longer live freely, he had already lost.

But Mahiru is different.

This girl is different.

She came here, to not lose. To continue the love with the person who was forbidden for her to love. With her own hands. She came here to choose her own destiny.

Shinya asked.

“So, I have a question.”

“What is it?”

“The person you love. Is he stronger than you?”

Mahiru smiled again happily. Mahiru smiled as if she was having fun. That face is totally that of a girl head over heels in love.

At that moment, she looked the loveliest.

As if she was thinking about the matter, she slightly turned her head to one side and said,

“Hmm.. Guren is… I wonder. Whether he is strong or weak, though, I won’t change my mind.”

“Eh, that’s unfair. Then my turn won’t come.”

Upon Shinya’s words, Mahiru laughed again.

A bright smile resembling of this calm, serene afternoon.

“Guren is strong, probably. Stronger than me. A lot.”

“So, you like that Guren person?”

“Mhmm.”

“Because he’s strong?”

“Mhmm.”

“So. Is that so. Then, I got it. I will act as the cover-up. Until you can be with the person you love, I will act as the cover-up in his place.”

Mahiru smiled cheerfully.

“Good. Then, please take care of me from now on, Hiiragi Shinya-san.”

“You can just call me by my name. I will do the same. It’s less suspicious that way, right? So, Mahiru. Please take care of me too.”

Once again, upon Shinya’s words, Mahiru smiled.

Her face was extremely pretty.

“……”

And there, for the first time, he felt a slight jealousness toward Guren, who he had not even met yet.

Volume 3 Chapter 1 – The Demon’s Hand

Ichinose Guren looked at the blood that was drawn from his arm.

When the needle was stuck in, black blood containing a large amount of carbon dioxide was drawn out.

“…… Guren-sama.”

The female scientist called out to him.

Guren looked at her. A twenty-year-old female wearing a white lab coat was standing there.

She was a curse researcher from the《Mikado no Tsuki》which the Ichinose House was affiliated with——Iori Mitsuki.

When the fifth syringe was pulled out, Mitsuki spoke.

“The investigation is now completed.”

“Mm? Ah, thanks.”

Guren nodded and rolled down his sleeve.

“So when will the test results be ready?”

“…… The rest of the researchers have already began investigating Guren-sama’s status, and there have been some results.”

“Mm. And?”

“…… There is indication of poison in your body.”

“What kind of poison?”

“……”

A moment of silence, then Mitsuki replied hesitantly.

“Unknown…… But it seems like a man-made poison that is injected with a curse. As for what kind of curse it is, it is still unclear at this stage.”

“Our research facility is unable to analyse this advanced curse?”

“…… It seems so.”

“Are you able to thoroughly investigate it?”

“Of course! Please let us continue working. We’ll continue to erode the poison in Guren-sama’s body!”

Guren look at the determined expression on Mitsuki’s face through his narrowed eyes, and thought of another face.

The face of the girl who put the poison in him.

Hiiragi Mahiru’s beautiful face.

She was determined to do the impossible and successfully seal the《Oni》into the weapon using the《Kiju》.

No, it seems most likely that it already has a considerable combat capability.

No matter what, I was able to cut down an overwhelmingly powerful member of the vampire aristocracy that humans would never be able to match up against.

That is already significantly beyond the current science and technology and current power standard of curses.

“……”

Guren recalled back.

To Mahiru’s smile.

To what she had said.

『But you’re already not human. Your arm was cut off yet it was able to be reattached. In your soul, you already have a mix of《Oni》inside. So in the end, it will break. Like me, your heart will be eroded away by the darkness. Ah, Guren. Looks like we’ll never be apart. Let’s become demons together eh.』

Demon.

Demon’s poison.

《Kiju》*poison.*

Guren gently touched his arm where it had been cut off, which was now safely reattached.

Then, Mitsuki spoke.

“Guren-sama. May I say something?”

“What is it?”

“Please allow the poison to be experimented on a few more human subjects.”

“……”’

“Even though currently the『Mikado no Tsuki』doesn’t allow such experiements……”

Before she could finish, Guren shook his head.

“No.”

“But to resolve this matter, then……”

“No. I do not allow it. I’m the only one to be experimented upon. Isn’t that enough?”

Guren answered.

No, of course, it’s impossible. To conduct such curse research, it is essential for human experimentation, however because of this, such experiments were banned.

The one who issued the ban isn’t 『Mikado no Tsuki』.

But the arrogant masters——namely, led by the Hiiragi House, the『Mikado no Oni』.

If the Ichinose House starts to conduct human experimentation, and if it is known that we are conducting forbidden curse research, then it is a declaration of war against the 『Mikado no Oni』.

If that were the case, the 『Mikado no Tsuki』*will instantly be defeated. The gap in power is just too great.*

So,

“…… Just use me. In treating me——just use this reason to research as well.”

But Mitsuki let out an expression that showed she did not agree.

“I can’t do this! The toxin is now eroding Guren-sama’s body. This is a urgent research——”

“I already said no!”

Guren shouted.

Mitsuki stopped.

Guren said to her.

“Once you start the human experimentation, then you can’t stop it, right? Researching a new curse, using new experiment, creating new powers, the power, the power…… Then, what next? You’ll be swallowed up by the power, or you’ll be defeated by the Hiiragi House. Either way, the result is destruction.”

Guren thought of Mahiru.

『Guren, I like you.』

Obsessed with power, Mahiru collapses.

『I like you, Guren. You and I are the same, where insanity and demons live inside of us.』

Guren spoke.

“Mitsuki. We still haven’t reached that stage. Don’t do human experimentation.”

“……”

“Just use me as the subject for the experiment. Just experimenting on me is enough. There is no need to complete the 《Kiju》 research. Just enough to find a way to counteract the toxin——”

But this time, Mitsuki smiled.

“Guren-sama.”

“Mm?”

“I’m the same as Guren-sama, A blood type.”

“So……”

What? I wanted to ask this, but what Mitsuki is planning to do, I’ve already figured it out.

“Stop……”

But it was already too late. Her hands was holding the syringe. Inside the syringe contained Guren’s blood. Mitsuki pierced the needle on her wrist.

“…… I can’t let Guren-sama became the experiment material.”

And then injected the blood.

“Idiot!”

Guren grabbed the syringe, but already half the blood was injected.

Of course, there was a possibility that nothing would happen.

In mixing in Guren’s blood, there was a possibility that nothing could happen.

No, actually, Mitsuki smiled.

“…… This way, the experiment can go on a bit longer. Using my body as experiment material——”

“……”

But, Mitsuki was unable to continue.

Her expression had completely changed.

Her whole body was shaking, she used her right hand her left hand where the bloody had been injected into.

“…… What is…… this…… so powerful, this power…… I…… I can’t, I don’t want——”

Mitsuki screamed.

Her left hand swelled up. The blade curse wrapped around her hand. Raising her hand, her hand almost looked like a demon’s hand——

“How, I can’t, control this……”

Then, Guren pulled out his sword.

The sword which he got from Hiiragi Kureto, the demon sword 《Hakushi》.

He cut off Mitsuki’s mutated left hand. But the left hand began to swell even more. From where he had cut, spider legs started to emerge, standing up.

The hand that was cut off was already bigger than the laboratory bed.

In the palm, there were three eyes.

Then there was a mouth with teeth that appeared——from when that mouth that wanted to swallow up Mitsuki, “Go to hell!”

Once again, Guren used his full power and raised the sword again. He stabbed his sword between the middle finger and ring finger and cut through down the whole hand. The sword swept down sideways.

Then in an instant.

The monster’s three eyes glared at him.

Then it opened its mouth.

And spoke a in a low, hoarse voice.

“…… What is this, you’re also an 《Oni》?”

“Shut up, monster!”

Guren cut down the hand again.

Then the hand fell silent. It was cut in a cross-shape and it fell onto the bed.

This time, the doors of the laboratory opened. A few researchers in white lab coats came in.

“Guren-sama!”

“Guren-sama!”

“Forget about me. Go treat Mitsuki!”

Guren told the other researchers.

He looked back at Mitsuki who was slumped on the bed. She had lost her arm. Talismans were affixed to where her arm was cut off. It looked like she had already stopped the bleeding.

The researchers wanted to move Mitsuki.

But Mitsuki wasn’t listening to what the people around her were saying. She stared at the giant hand that had been poisoned on the bed——

“…… So powerful. This kind of power…… what is going on? Never seen this…… need to….. study this power.”

She had already lost her arm.

She already couldn't control the power.

But she still had an expression of pleasure as she spoke.

Then Guren thought about Mahiru's words again.

『You can't resist it. The desire for power. The thirst for power. Because you and I are the same, living in the depths of a bottomless cave……』

Arrogance in infection.

Desire for infection.

Several researchers were looking at the demon's corpse on the bed with interest.

Someone wanted to touch it, then Mitsuki spoke.

"Don't touch it. This thing is still contagious. You have to wear anti-curse uniforms from now on."

She was supported by the other researchers and looked over to Guren.

"Guren-sama, it's embarrassing for you to see me like this. But, one word from you to progress the research. This mysterious curse, I'll unravel it for you."

Guren wanted to laugh at her words, he said.

"…… You just lost an arm and you're saying this?"

But Mitsuki mistook his words for praise and smiled.

"In order for humanity to progress…… In order for 『Mikado no Tsuki』 led by Guren-sama to become more powerful, it is a necessarily sacrifice."

If there was a Hiiragi spy in the midst, those would have been treated as an 『attempted rebellion』 and the 『Mikado no Tsuki』 would be eliminated. However, every researcher in the room Guren had known since childhood.

No matter what, this place is far from Hiiragi home base——in Shibuya there were only people from the 『Mikado no Tsuki』 living in the town in Aichi mountains.

And they were in the centre of the basement of the Ichinose mansion, in the research laboratory.

"Humanity? It seems a bit indulgent to speak like that."

Guren said.

Mitsuki laughed.

"For researchers, everyone is the same…… Alright, everyone, let's start. Regarding this experiment, we already have a head start. And Guren-sama?"

"What?"

"It's time."

Guren looked at the clock in the room.

It was one in the morning.

If I want to reach the Hiiragi school, I have to head off now.

"…… I will still return. Continue the research."

Guren nodded.

"Yes. I will produce results for you."

"Don't rush. If the circumstances become risky——"

Then, Mitsuki replied.

“We will be careful not to let the Hiiragi House find out…… Alright, I understand. I was a little bit brave today. Because I wanted to I wanted to establish some information today in front of Guren-sama.”

So that was the case.

Even though she wanted to seriously research the《Kiju》, she didn’t have the approval for it. So, that was why she made such a move in front of me——no,

“…… Don’t tell me that everyone here feels the same way?”

“……”

Everyone had a nervous expressions.

That is natural.

Because they all know what they were getting into.

Comrades.

Iori Mitsuki——even those she knew there was a possibility of dying, she still went ahead with such a reckless thing.

Guren looked outside the room. There were already a few 『Mikado no Tsuki』soldiers guarding around. They were all familiar faces. *Looks like we’re gathering a lot of strength.*

Mitsuki spoke.

“…… Guren-sama. This experiment, if successful, the long-cherished wish of 『Mikado no Tsuki』can finally be……”

“Enough, Mitsuki.”

Guren interrupted her.

He understand what she was going to say.

The wish of 『Mikado no Tsuki』*——is simply to completely eradicate the* 『Mikado no Oni』.

To break away from being used, being humiliated, being insulted.

And now, in front of us, there is a possibility of being about to reach that long-cherished wish.

So,

“……”

Mitsuki and the rest, they have already lost control.

The same with Mahiru. Completely infected with arrogance.

Once we start, the Hiiragi House is bound to find out. Everyone will be killed if we’re exposed. Yet knowing this……

“….. Are you ready to fight the Hiiragi House?”

“We have no intention of letting Guren-sama fight by himself.”

Mitsuki replied.

“……”

“Even though our parents are loyal to Guren-sama’s father——Ichinose Sakae-sama——but we are loyal to Guren-sama.”

“……”

“Most importantly, after Sakae-sama was tortured by the Hiiragi House, we were even more determined. We don’t want to be humiliated again……”

But Guren didn’t let her finish and said.

“…… Enough. I understand. You can stop now.”

“But.”

“No, this is enough. I will not live up to your expectations.”

Mitsuki’s expression became clear.

Happy expressions emerged from all the researchers’ faces.

But this is suicide.

To challenge an organisation that is 1000 times stronger than them.

To achieve this goal requires arrogance.

But,

“…… Minimise human trials. We want to win this while maintaining a rational state.”

“But.”

“There is no ‘but’. This is an order. If we were to be found out by the Hiiragi House straightaway, things would get very complicated. So, don’t do anything too obvious.”

“……”

“As for the declaration of war, I’ll decide that.”

“But, just to carry on so calmly like that……”

Guren interrupted her.

“If you want to do it, then do it within the year.”

Suddenly, all the researchers were startled.

Because it was already past the middle of August.

So to do it within the year, before the start of the war, that would be just about four months.

But in order to keep it secret from the Hiiragi House, that would be the time limit.

Mahiru also said.

『Let me tell you, this year at Christmas, the world will be destroyed.』

『The bells of the apocalypse will sound and the virus will spread. So that’s why the world needs to have even more power.』

Virus——so it means there is a possibility of biological warfare. About the scale of destruction, it seems the whole world will be involved.

Although I don’t know how the 《Hyakuya Church》 *are going to deal with it, but common sense tells me that* 《Hyakuya Church》 *may already have the vaccine.*

In order to threaten the world.

If you do not surrender to us, everyone will die——maybe it will turn out like that. Because the 《Hyakuya Church》 *is a worldwide organisation, there is a possibility of this happening.*

For this reason, the 《Hyakuya Church》 *has waged war.*

There is already very little time left before the world is destroyed, so they don’t care about each other’s powers and have started a war with 『Mikado no Oni』.

“…… Ah. On Christmas day, will there be an angel from the heavens who will have a hand in destroying the world? You gotta be joking, this is Japan after all.”

Guren said softly and smiled.

So before it’s too late, I have to get my hands on more power.

There already isn't time.

Time waits for no one.

Guren understood that.

And said to Mitsuki.

"So this is it. Quietly, steadily, and quickly."

"Yes!"

Everyone answered.

Things are now set in motion.

I'm afraid I won't be able to stop it.

Now that we have started a rebellion against the Hiiragi House.

◆

After coming out from the laboratory, the two always by Guren's side came forward, moving past the soldiers.

Hanayori Sayuri and Yukimi Shigure.

The two of them had worried expressions.

Sayuri spoke.

"Guren-sama! What on earth happened after we left you!?"

Then, Shigure looked inside the room and saw the researchers working flurried and turned to Sayuri and said.

"Iori Mitsuki lost her arm. And there is a strange monster corpse over there."

Sayuri looked surprised at Shigure.

"…… Guren-sama. Are you keeping something from us?"

But Guren shook his head.

"You don't have to know……"

But Shigure interrupted Guren and said with a cold expression.

"That is unacceptable. We are here to protect Guren-sama. If we don't have a clear grasp of the situation, we can't protect Guren-sama……"

"That's right. So that's why I'm not telling you. You're the closest ones protecting me at the Hiiragi school. So as much as possible, I won't leak any information to you. If I let you know and if the Hiiragi House gets that information from you……"

Sayuri immediately replied.

"Not a problem. If we are caught, we will immediately commit suicide."

Shigure also agreed with her words.

"So that's why……"

But Guren laughed.

"Ha, do you have the determination to commit suicide? Don't underestimate the Hiiragi House. If you know about the situation, then you can't leave this room. I'll get a replacement. So if you want to be by my side, then you better shut your ears."

Sayuri and Shigure looked at each other.

Then after a while, Sayuri and Shigure spoke.

"So, in order to be around Guren-sama's side all the time……"

“This is how it is.”

Guren walked past the two of them.

“I’m going back to Tokyo. Where’s the car?”

“It’s already prepared.”

“Then let’s head out. Tomorrow we still have to go to school.”

With that, Guren walked out.

Volume 3 Chapter 2 Part 1

“That’s him, Ichinose Guren-sama.”

Hearing someone say that.

Inside First Shibuya High’s classroom.

Until recently, everyone here was supposed to be an enemy.

Welcoming him had originally been just their condemning, cold shoulders and Coca-Cola cans from who knows where–

Opening the classroom door, a few students were exchanging words in hushed voices out in the corridor.

“Apparently he’s been chosen to be Kureto-sama’s subordinate.”

“Rumours say he was purposely hiding his strength, but Kureto-sama saw through him.”

“He’s even on good terms with Shinya-sama, his strength has also been acknowledged by the Jujou and Goshi houses.”

“Which fool was it that said he was an Ichinose rat”

“Didn’t you yourself once say it”

“Of course not! Quit joking around!”

Guren himself ignored those unpleasant conversations, spacing out at his table. As expected, he hadn’t gotten enough sleep.

Overnight, he had been in a car, travelling from Aichi to Tokyo via the Tomei Expressway at 150km/h*, and in that time, his mind had been occupied with what might happen in the future, so he had not been able to sleep properly.

“……”

Guren narrowed his eyes and gazed out the window.

Although it could not be felt in the well-adjusted temperature of the classroom, it was already hot to the point where the scenery outside the window were becoming crooked.

Today was the 22nd of August.

Normal schools were already having their holidays, but in this school there was no such laid-back system.

In the news there was effervescence** that the record for the highest temperatures as of late had been broken again. Why had the weather become so scorching hot? If the weather continued getting hotter, it might lead to food problems caused by abnormal weather. Although, the world was supposed to be ending at Christmas. Thinking about food problems now seemed meaningless.

“……Guren. Guren!”

Someone was calling his name.

But Guren didn’t respond and continued staring out the window.

Then the voice’s owner got angry. And forcefully banged on the table.

“Oi, Ichinose Guren! Why are you ignoring my question!”

Guren gazed in an irritated manner at the source of the voice, where his female

classmate stood.

Most outstanding was her beautiful red hair, strong eyes and snow white skin.

It was the well-known Jujou house's daughter–Mito Jujou.

She continued to say,

"Every day you don't work hard, constantly having that half-hearted attitude…. After being acknowledged by Kureto-sama and gaining a small reputation you've become arrogant?"

"…… Who's become arrogant?"

Guren retorted, Mito then said angrily,

"I'm talking about you! Ichinose Guren. In class you act as if there's no one around, during group practices and sorcery exams you don't show your true strength. Exactly what are you trying to achieve!?"

Faced with that kind of question, Guren fretted over how to answer. In fact, all the lesson content were below his level. There was absolutely nothing for him to learn.

But all the people there were his enemies, so there was no reason to let his enemies see his strength.

So, going about every day like this gave people a half-hearted and lazy impression of him, but– even if he explained this to her she wouldn't understand.

If there was appraisal or improvement in reputation from the Hiragi house– to the people here, that would be something worth celebrating.

Thus, even if Guren became arrogant it would not be anything out of the ordinary, because this was something that was worth being proud of.

As expected, would it be better if the joy is acted out? But, regardless, my bad attitude and true strength has already been seen through by Kureto, so is it necessary to hide it?

While thinking about these, involuntarily,

“….. Uwah~”

A sigh escaped from his mouth.

Mito then got even more upset.

“What kind of attitude is that!”

“You keep shouting at me like that, my ears hurt now.”

“First of all, during group practice just now, I saw you quickly lose to the opposing student… What’s up with that! There should be more to your strength, right?”

To this, Guren shrugged his shoulders and replied.

“Nope, I only have that amount of strength.”

Her already raised eyebrows went up higher as she said,

“I’m saying this kind of attitude of yours causes such a headache!”

“Headache? Why? You don’t have a reason to have a headache.”

Mito forcefully replied.

“Of course I do! If you’re slacking off, those from the famous houses who are with you will also be ridiculed by others, why did you not notice?”

So it was about this.

In other words, as Kureto’s subordinate, with Mito and Goshi now teammates, if Guren disappointed, the rest of the members would not have an unscathed reputation.

To this, Guren smiled.

“Why do I have to be concerned over your image as well?”

“That’s because… We’re all Kureto-sama’s subordinates, from this day on we’ll

also be comrades working together, that degree of things……”

But, Guren didn’t hear the rest of her words.

Comrades.

To think she would call them comrades?

Kureto-sama’s subordinates, comrades?

It was an honour to be Hiragi Kureto-sama’s hand-picked subordinates.

Thinking about these in his mind, that kind of words,

“….. Haha”

A kind of self-deprecating laugh, followed by another sigh and continuing to pull a long face.

“Oi Guren!”

Mito called out.

Closely followed was laughter from the boy sitting beside him.

Hiragi Shinya.

“Well well, Mito-chan, don’t nag him anymore. That lazy and poor personality of his isn’t a recent development.”

Mito respectfully addressed the Hiragi’s adopted son.

“Ah, Shinya-sama. But…”

“Moreover to someone of his calibre, what this school is teaching during lessons is exceedingly boring. Right? Guren. You agree, right?”

“……..”

After he ignored it, Mito got angry again.

“Oi, you! Daring to ignore Shinya-sama’s words, exactly what do you want!”

Hearing that roar, the people outside started their discussion again.

“Oi, as expected that rumour was true. Surprisingly, he’s on such good terms with Shinya-sama and the Jujou house’s daughter.”

“Hey, that rebellious Ichinose house has become loyal to the Hiragi house… To Kureto-sama…?”

To that sound,

“……”

Guren turned back to the window, gently biting his lip.

Volume 3 Chapter 2 Part 2

SOME OF THE FOLLOWING CONTENT MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE. READ WITH CAUTION.

In the past, the Ichinose house was the most loyal to the Hiragi house, and the difference in power was the least compared to the rest of the houses.

But five hundred years ago, they split from the Hiragi house and created the “Mikado no Tsuki” (The Emperor’s Moon) faction.

There was no accurate record of the situation back then.

But, everyone knew the reason.

The origin is just a love story gone wrong.

A tragic love story.

Once, the Ichinose house’s eldest daughter was beautiful, the Hiragi house’s eldest and second son were both trying to woo the Ichinose’s daughter.

After various twists and turns*, the second son won the girl’s heart.

But apparently the eldest son could not accept this.

THE FOLLOWING CONTENT IS RATED PG13. VIEWER DISCRETION IS ADVISED.

So one night, the eldest son raped the girl, caused her to bear his child, and castrated the second son.

okay it’s cool now

After that, the eldest son chased the second son and the girl out of the house, together with his child.

The banished second son then created the “Mikado no Tsuki”, a new religious organization, together with the Ichinose’s daughter.

However, it would have been very simple for the eldest son to defeat them.

Because the eldest son was the heir to the Hiragi house.

The one who commanded “Mikado no Oni” (The Emperor’s Demon), heir to the Hiragi house.

But, the eldest son didn't eliminate the organization that the second son and the Ichinose house's daughter had set up.

The reason was to humiliate them.

To let the Ichinose house's daughter who didn't choose him, and the brother who betrayed him, be mocked and humiliated for eternity.

To let them live in shame.

To let their children and grandchildren, in the future, all live in shame.

The castrated second son, of course, could not impregnate the girl with their own child.

Thus, the child that the eldest son caused the girl to bear– the child of the head of the Hiragi house was raised by the head of "Mikado no Tsuki".

The second son was always being ridiculed.

The girl was always being ridiculed.

The two still deeply loved each other.

But, with the exception of their love, they had lost everything.

Everyone from the other houses laughed at them.

Ridiculed them.

This was the consequence of betrayal.

This was the consequence of betraying the Hiragi house.

Just like that, all the houses had had the mindset of ridiculing the Ichinose house instilled.

So the Ichinoses would forever be rats.

Even from birth, all just dirty rats.

The only thing was, a long time had passed, and these had become legends as well.

To the new generation of Ichinoses and the rest of the Hiragi house, it was already insignificant.

That's why Kureto would calmly use Guren. The Hiragi house's eldest son, forgiving the Ichinose house.

This was a violation of the traditional way, but it was reasonable. With regards to their ancestors' love stories and the like, no one cared.

The Ichinose house was just one house, out of

Nii. Sangu. Shijin.

Goshi. Rikudōu. Shichikai.

Hakke. Kuki. Jūjō.

Including the Ichinose house there were ten, and out of them, the Ichinose house was the strongest.

For that house to be following Kureto-sama– this kind of thing was enough to become a serious discussion topic.

It's also possible that Kureto only took Guren on as a subordinate because of his political nature.

Break time was over, class was beginning to start again.

Mito then huffily returned to her seat.

On the way she was even laughed at by Goshi.

"You really don't learn your lesson huh. Why do you care that much about Guren's matters? Unless you like him…"

"You shut up!"

Goshi hadn't finished speaking before he received a punch.

Goshi laughed.

But, no one else in class dared to laugh. They were afraid of joking about those from the famous houses, afraid that there would be consequences in the future.

That's why, everyone could just manage small pleasant smiles.

In the end, whether it was Mito or Goshi, they were all highly respected by everyone.

The teacher was already standing on the podium. The fourth period had started.

This class was about western spellcraft, but for Guren there was a lack of interest in the subject.

Shinya, sitting by his side, gently patted his shoulder.

“Hey Guren”

“……”

“Hey”

“You’re noisy”

“Ah, well, this is during lessons. So speaking softer would be better right?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

But Shinya moved his chair closer, softly pressed himself against Guren and whispered.

“…… Speaking this softly, will it cause the teacher to get angry?”

Guren turned, irritated.

As expected, Shinya was still smiling away. In this school, there was obviously no teacher that dared to get angry at a student with the Hiragi name. Shinya only said that because he thought it was fun.

To this, Guren didn’t say a word. This guy being annoying wasn’t anything new, there was no need to acknowledge him.

But Shinya, not caring, continued to whisper by his ear.

“Tonight, [Hyakuya Church] will appear. So where do you want to meet up?”

In that instant, Guren’s eyes inadvertently widened.

His eyes locked on Shinya.

This was not the kind of thing that one could say in this school operated by “Mikado no Oni”.

If someone else heard, one would immediately be captured and interrogated about this explosive piece of news.

But, Shinya kept smiling as though nothing was out of the ordinary. To deliver this piece of news required, Guren was sure, thorough preparation.

Even if it was like this,

“…. Don’t use these kinds of methods to scare me.”

Guren said. Shinya smiled again.

“The you who keeps ignoring people and making Mito-chan angry isn’t good~*”

“Stop joking. I have no interest in playing around with you.

Guren said as he looked at Shinya sternly.

“I’m not playing~ I have no interest in idle games either.”

Guren stared at Shinya.

Shinya smiled, letting Guren watch him.

Guren had no intention whatsoever of believing this guy.

He had let Guren have the piece of what Mahiru had called the [Four Horsemen of John] that she left behind, so he could be trusted to a certain extent. But, carelessly trusting him and it resulting in an non compensatable loss, that kind of thing might also happen.

So, it was necessary to handle things carefully.

“…….”

Guren did not answer.

Shinya produced a piece of paper and lay it on the table. On it was the address of tonight’s meeting.

This piece of paper had Shinya’s fingerprints on it. If Guren passed it to Kureto, there was a chance that the meeting with [Hyakuya Church] would be raided by the Hiragi house, and Shinya would be killed.

In other words, Shinya had once again exposed his weak point to his opponent.

Guren displayed an expression of shock and asked,

“….. Why do you trust me so much?”

Shinya smiled.

“How about I say it’s your vigilance towards me that is unbelievable?”

“Because your face is infuriating.”

“Ahaha. I clearly look so friendly?”

“Shut up.”

“….. Moreover, you might not know anything about me, but I keep hearing stories about you~”

“……”

“From when I was a kid, from first meeting with Mahiru… Because, everything she said was about you.”

He says.

Hearing this, Guren laughed.

“Then, did you go mad with jealousy? You like Mahiru, right?”

To this Shinya smiled faintly.

“To put it more accurately, I only have a good impression towards Mahiru, and not that much of a like.”

“…… Ah ha”

“But, I’m jealous of you.”

“Ha? Why?”

“I’d always been wondering, what kind of person you were. If you appeared before me, I’d like to try and see who’s stronger, or know what this guy looks like, that kind of thing.”

At this he recalled.

When he first entered the school, being on the receiving end of Shinya’s “attack”.

Of course, even now he could not be sure that what Shinya said was the truth, but maybe he could still be trusted to some extent.

If he lived in a world where the word trust was used. But.

Guren picked up the piece of paper Shinya had put on the table. Keeping Shinya’s fingerprints on it, he put it in his pocket.

The act of purposely preserving the fingerprints was noticed by Shinya and he smiled.

“So diligent~”

“In case something unexpected happens it’ll be gotten rid off, it’s trash’s way of survival**.”

Hearing Guren say this, Shinya appeared to be slightly unhappy, looking at Guren, he said,

“…… Those humble words…… If it was Mahiru she would immediately make a disgusted face, why would she like you.”

“Maybe, it’s because I look friendlier?”

Guren said. Shinya looked at him in a shocked manner.

“….. Ha, hahaha.”

And started laughing.

Guren directed his gaze out the window.

Heat so intense it’s as if the school campus is burning.

Summer.

Midsummer.

If this world was ending at Christmas, then this would be the last summer.

Volume 3 Chapter 2 (Part 3)

YEAAAAAAAAH I GOT THE CHAPTER DONE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

HAPPY EARLY CHRISTMAS PRESENT GUYS ♥♥♥

Thanks for all your patience!!!!

After lessons and club activities, the phone rang.

The caller's name was displayed as "Kureto Hiragi".

The Hiragi house's likely heir; the school council president that no one in school dares to defy.

Accepting the call and hearing the other person's voice.

"What is it?"

"Wrong. Is there anything you need, Kureto-sama? –Say it like this."

"Are you the kind with strict rules for subordinates?"

"No, it's just a joke."

"Your jokes aren't funny at all. Having been spoilt by your followers, has your brain ceased functioning?"

"Hahaha, do you have a death wish?"

"I dare you to try it. To you isn't it something that's ridiculously easy?"

"…. Hm. But, I quite like this attitude of yours."

"Eh~ What attitude are you referring to?"

"Although you're very sharp-tongued, you know you can't beat me and thus are very clear of where you stand."

"……."

Guren didn't answer. Because this was the truth. At the moment they were definitely not equals.

[Mikado no Tsuki] definitely was not [Mikado no Oni]'s equal.

This was not a child's quarrel. Even if they were superior in swordsmanship it didn't mean a thing.

If in the future the people important to Guren were violated by Kureto, even someone was impregnated, Guren would be unable to resist.

It was the same as 500 years ago.

The situation had not changed at all.

Mito and Goshi, having packed up and gotten ready to go home, walked over to him.

Goshi saw him and smiled.

“Getting a call right after school finishes, is it your girlfriend?”

After Mito heard that,

“Eh!?”

was her reaction. Guren wasn’t sure why but she stared at him.

Guren ignored her and continued his conversation.

“Then, exactly what is it?

“Tomorrow during lunch break, come to the student council room for a while.”

“Don’t want to.”

“Haha, you don’t have the right to refuse. See you tomorrow.”

“Blegh.”

By the time Guren had blown a raspberry, the other party had already hung up.

Shinya, sitting on the chair next to him, lifted his head and asked.

“Was that Kureto-nii-san?

“It’s my girlfriend.”

Guren answered, getting Mito all riled up.

“…. W-wait! You’re still in the learning phase, why would you have a pointless skill like making girlfriends?”

What is she talking about?

With an annoyed face, Guren looked at her, then sighed and ignored her. Mito’s cheeks flared red for a moment and stared at him with growing anger. Seeing this, Goshi, for no reason, started laughing.

Guren didn't care. Grabbing his bag, he left his seat.

Mito continued scolding him in an annoyed tone.

"Quickly leaving after being called by a girl? Seriously, you're terrible."

Hiding a smile, Shinya said to Mito,

The phone call he just received was from Kureto-nii-san."

"Eh? Eh, what? Really?"

Shinya heard.

"He wants you to go to the student council room?"

Guren shook his head.

"No. It's tomorrow during lunch break."

Hearing him say this, Mito got even more agitated.

"Wait, wait, Guren, you actually treat Kureto-sama with that kind of attitude? That's the real problem here…"

"You're annoying."

"What annoying! Wait…"

Guren left the classroom in the middle of Mito's angry shouting. But Mito seemed to still want to keep talking, so Guren shut the door.

In the corridor, Sayuri and Shigure were already waiting for him. Currently, they were in the class next door to his.

"Ah, ah, Guren-sama. You kept us waiting!"

After which Shigure coldly said.

"The Hiragi house's dregs didn't do anything to you today, did they?"

Behind him, Mito had just finished saying "this and that would happen to those who speak disrespectfully to Kureto-sama". And now, right in front of her, was an attendant who had just called the Hiragis dregs.

Guren almost laughed at the huge difference as he replied.

"Nope. It was just like it is normally."

As he said this Sayuri revealed a worried expression,

“Just like it is normally, exactly what does that entail? Having a Coke can thrown at you?”

Shigure’s face darkened shortly after,

“If it really is like that, then as expected, the Hiragis should all be exterminated.”

As she said that, she took the knife hidden in her school uniform’s sleeve out and held it in her hand. She was serious.

But Sayuri did not notice any of this and happily continued talking.

“Oh yes, Guren-sama! What would you like to eat tonight? Whatever Guren-sama wants to eat, I can make it…..”

“Curry.”

“Eh, curry again~?”

At that moment, the classroom door opened. Mito walked out and noticed Shigure’s cold gaze.

“Ah, Yukimi-san… You have such a scary expression, did something happen?”

“No, nothing at all.”

“But, it’s better to talk out here. About that, there are some things I would like Yukimi-san to talk to Guren about. Being disrespectful, having a bad attitude towards Kureto-sama, with Guren’s current position it’s very disadvantageous.”

But, Shigure directed that cold gaze towards Mito and replied,

“Guren-sama has not done anything inappropriate.”

“But as his attendants you always shelter him…”

“Outsiders have no right to judge my master. It’s getting annoying so do you mind shutting up?”

“…. Um.”

Thus Mito awkwardly silenced herself and looked at Guren helplessly.

“Why are you looking at me?”

Guren said, Mito’s cheeks reddened slightly,

“….. I-I’m just…. Concerned about you…..”

“Busybody.”

No sooner had the words left his mouth than Goshi walked out behind Mito.

“Alright, stop bullying Mito-chan. Today is that, right? The day everyone gets friendly and goes to Guren’s house to play, right? So let’s be friendly with each other.”

He said.

But this was the first time Guren had heard about this.

“Hah? What’s that?”

Guren couldn’t stop himself from asking, Goshi smiled as he explained.

“That~ You see, we’re all Kureto-sama’s subordinates, so we’re comrades. And it’s about time we deepened our relationships, right?”

“Nope, I’ve never thought that way.”

“Hm, it is. That’s why I thought of this great idea: Everyone going to Guren’s house together.”

“Stop joking. It’s obvious this conversation is invalid…..”

But, from the classroom came another annoyance, this time it was Shinya walking out.

“What, what? There’s an interesting suggestion. Shall I go or not~”

With a look of impatience, Guren turned away.

“This is stupid. I’m going home.”

And he left with his two attendants.

But, as she walked, Sayuri kept looking back.

Guren heard footsteps and asked.

“….. Are all three of them following?”

“Yes.”

“…… Hah, are those guys serious?”

Shigure looked up at him and asked.

“Do you want me to get rid of them?”

“That you threw Mito off is already pretty good.”

“……That is, although it’s like that….. Uwu….. I don’t have enough power, I’m very sorry……”

“No, forget it, it’s not like I’m angry.”

And then Guren gently patted Shigure’s head. Instantly, she looked up at Guren, shocked. On her usually expressionless face, a light blush appeared.

In comparison to this, the reaction by his side was even more impressive. Sayuri revealed an exaggerated expression,

“Ah! Ah! What was that just now! Shigure is too sly. I want it too! I want Guren-sama to pat my head!”

But, Shigure restrained Sayuri’s hand and said,

“…… No. Previously Sayuri made an unauthorized confession to Guren-sama and got patted on the head so n-o-. This time it’s my turn.”

“Eh, Yuki-chan is so sly. I want my head to be patted.”

“No.”

“But but–”

Both master and servant had transparent expressions.

As Guren patted her head, he had slipped the piece of paper Shinya had given him behind Shigure’s ear. On that piece of paper was the time and location of the meeting.

2am.

Hikarigaoka Park.

In front of the tennis court.

This is the location for the meeting with [Hyakuya Church]. Of course this paper did not have the words [Hyakuya Church] written on it, but, before the meeting sufficient preparations had to be made. Equipment had to prepared. Especially since it was secret operation, no one could be allowed to know about it.

Shigure said.

“Putting the jokes aside, today I need to retrieve our change of clothes, so I will go back first. What about you, Sayuri?”

“Then I will go to the supermarket. Today, everyone…..”

And she looked back again. Guren answered,

“Probably. These people are very troublesome, we probably can’t throw them off.”

“Is that so. Then, as a precautionary measure, I will prepare a meal for everyone.”

Sayuri said this, and Goshi moved closer to say,

“Ah, we’re going to eat Sayuri’s home cooked food? That’s really worth anticipating~”

Sayuri smiled coldly back at him, then said,

“Then I will prepare curry, Guren-sama.”

After saying thus, she turned and ran off with Shigure.

Watching their backs as they left, Goshi walked forward such that he was next to Guren.

“…… Guren, you’re really sly~ To have two cute girls be your attendants.”

Next, Shinya moved to Goshi’s side and as they all walked together,

“Goshi could just tell his family that he wants this too.”

“Ah, Shinya-sama…. No, I’m not as outstanding as my younger brother. Rather, it should be said that they don’t even notice me at all…..”

“But now you’re Kureto-nii-sama’s subordinate……”

“Ah, yeah yeah, that’s true. After that the attitude of everyone at home changed immediately, but it’s exactly that which is slightly nauseating….. Even my brother seems like he has become nervous…..”

The two of them chatted as they walked beside Guren.

“You guys, are you really coming to my house?”

Guren asked this and Goshi nodded.

“Yep. It’s okay, right?”

Then Shinya smiled in a silly manner,

“Ah, it’s that right? You’ve got porn books hidden at your house, if we go it’ll be bad for you?”

Actually, it wasn’t because he was hiding porn books that he was worried. Even if people from the Hiragi house came to search, they would not find anything inappropriate.

Even if this was the case, why had Goshi suddenly said he wanted to go to Guren’s house? Shinya had probably noticed this as well.

No matter how you said it, today was the day they might meet with [Hyakuya Church].

Had it been found out about by Kureto, or something–

Perhaps tomorrow’s noon arrangement to go to the student council room was just a guise, in reality it was already known that we were going to meet [Hyakuya Church].

Guren directly questioned Goshi.

“…… Were you asked by Kureto to monitor me?”

Shinya looked at him. As expected, he was thinking about this as well.

Goshi shrugged his shoulders and replied,

“Nope. I didn’t receive any instructions from Kureto-sama.”

“Then why do you suddenly want to go to my house?”

“Because we’re comrades.”

“Hah?”

“We’re classmates, if we were in a normal school, it would already be school holidays.”

“So what?”

“It’s the kind of time when everyone goes to play together. Right?”

But, with an expression of incomprehension, Guren shook his head and said,

“I completely don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Goshi smiled.

“Really? Nevermind, there’s also~ Last night I was scolded by my parents~”

“Your parents? What did they say, you must have a good relationship with the Ichinose that Kureto has acknowledged?”

However, Goshi shook his head.

“Nope nope, it just happened to be the opposite. They said the Ichinose house is just traitorous trash that is rotten to the core, soon the true colours will be revealed. So don’t get too close to him.”

His parents have good judgement, Guren thought. But, Goshi seemed to want to defy his parents’ teachings.

“You should listen to your parents. It will be bad if you don’t.”

“So what if it’s bad.”

“Are you a rascal in the rebellious phase.”

“Haha, using a stolen motorcycle to go for a spin, that kind? That has a feeling of summer too~”

“Die.”

“Hahaha.”

Goshi laughed.

Shinya asked from the side,

“Goshi has a motorcycle license?”

“Ah, nope. What about Shinya-sama?”

“I don’t either. But while practising I can still sit on one~”

“Ah, me too~ As expected, using public things is still better? I want to ride a motorcycle~”

While they carried on this kind of conversation, they were still coming along. They actually wanted to follow him home.

As Shinya and Goshi were discussing motorcycles, Mito said,

“…… Can I…. ask a question?”

This fellow seemed to be intent on coming as well.

“….. That, just now, you patted Yukimi-san’s head.”

“Mm.”

“Ah, that….. that.”

“What.”

Mito found it hard to speak.

“….. Are the two of you, um, dating?”

“Ah?”

“That, or do you mean that even if you’re not officially dating you will still affectionately make contact with your subordinates? U-unless, even at night…..?”

“What are you talking about?”

“To think you would make a move on your attendants who are unable to resist, what kind of a person are you……”

“Ah, you’re so noisy.”

Guren sighed and stopped listening.

These guys, since just now what has been wrong with them? Constantly talking about pointless stuff and quarrelling as if they were normal students. In the first place, playing with comrades, this notion was already incomprehensible. Exactly what did they want to do by gathering at Guren’s house?

Unless it’s to play poker?

“……. Seriously.”

Walking out of school.

The weather is still as hot as ever.

Inside the school some students were still training. That was the kind of school this was. Even if the school had been attacked by [Hyakuya Church], even if the number of students had decreased, no one was going to stop and rest.

The restriction of information had not been lifted. About the war going on with [Hyakuya Church], only very few high ranked people would know about it.

But even if this was the case, small fights were still unendingly happening. It wasn’t just in Japan, countries all around the world had started having lots of fighting.

o although the [Mikado no Oni]'s headquarters were in Shibuya, currently it may well have been the safest place in the world.

Even if it was [Hyakuya Church], it was not easy to launch an attack on Shibuya.

But this school which had been harbouring a traitor was a different story.

Guren gazed at the campus and thought of the things Mahiru had done.

Dyeing this campus bright red with the blood of students. The things his childhood lover had done.

Mito noticed his absentminded gaze.

"……. I've always thought, time passes really fast."

Mito also seemed to notice the similarities between the campus before her eyes and that day's scene?

Blood and corpses everywhere– that scene.

"Ah. It's true."

He had clearly not moved forward and improved, yet time had already slipped away.

Mito said.

"In such a short time, I've already been saved by you twice."

"It's just a lucky coincidence."

She smiled bitterly and raised her head to look at Guren.

"…… Saying it's a lucky coincidence, wasn't it because of that that you were beaten black and blue and in a coma for a month?"

"That was because I was careless. Also, sleeping happens to be my hobby."

"Always using jokes to change the topic…. But, Guren."

Saying this, she grabbed the back of Guren's shirt, once again saying,

"…… I want to thank you. So, I want to repay you."

"Repay, huh. For example?"

"…… For example, formally acknowledging you in front of Kureto-sama, until you've achieved status in [Mikado no Oni], I will support you, that kind of thing."

Busybody– Although he thought this, Guren didn't say it.

"….. Moreover, otou-sama will not agree with the Guren now…."

"Eh?"

"It's nothing, I was just talking to myself."

And then for some unknown reason, she shyly stepped back.

As expected, it's impossible to understand her feelings.

It's impossible to understand Goshi's feelings too.

Why would they care about Ichinose trash, why would they support him? The research and development of the forbidden curse in Aichi, which they would immediately be punished for if the Hiragi house discovered it, had already started.

But why would these people believe him so easily?

Comrades? Friends? Achieve status as Kureto's subordinate? This kind of talk, was way too naive.

It was as Goshi's parents had said, the rotten to the core traitors of the Ichinose house were too dangerous to get close to.

But to think they wanted to be friends. Saying they were all Kureto's subordinates, wanting to build deeper relationships. Seeing them completely not suspect him, happily smiling, those raised as the missy and the young master,

"……"

Could he kill these two people?

Guren considered this.

Because they were enemies, the Ichinose house's enemies, so there would be a day when that chance would come. At that time, would he be able to do it?

When they were in Ueno he had not been able to. He should have done it at that time, but he could not. Whether or not this was the truth, he did not know either. This was not about doctrine or assertion. He clearly should have done it, but he could not.

—-I, could not do it.

"….."

This line kept repeating itself in his head.

He thought of what Kureto had said to him.

“Although you’re very sharp-tongued, you know you can’t beat me and thus are very clear of where you stand.”

Kureto had said that.

Though, was that the truth?

At the end of the day his ambition was just empty words. If Sayuri and Shigure were captured and held hostage, he must easily give up on this ambition, right?

In other words, he was still holding on to the hope that he could get by without having to kill Mito and Goshi, this type of thinking was simply too naive.

Then, maybe he should discard this ambition. Because he had long since dragged the Ichinose’s comrades into this.*

The war had already started.

It had long since started.

Even so, Goshi was still not worried at all and with a look of anticipation, asked,

“Hey, is your house far away?”

“If I say it is then will you go home?”

“Nope.”

To this, Guren sighed,

“It’s not that far…..”

Guren used a slightly exhausted voice to reply.

*I don’t even know anymore orz I’m so sorry

Volume 3 Chapter 3

『Right now I'm there. The firefighters have spared no effort to put out the fire, but it isn't successful. The fire doesn't seem to be going out.』

The reports on the TV are filled with noise. It seems to be due to the block of flats catching fire, and that the fire is spreading.

The TV shows footage taken from a helicopter; the 6 o'clock news is talking about the fire. Right now, the images switch to show a female presenter with a solemn expression, her head bowed.

The 6 o'clock news has started.

That is to say, it is already evening.

However, "Hey General~"

At this moment, Guren heard Shinya's voice coming from the living room.

In front of him, there was a mini Shogi chess set bought from a convenience store. Mito Jujo was was hesitating over what move to make. "Hmm…. wait a bit please!"

Mito crossed her arms, deep in thought as she contemplated her next move.

Goshi was sat on the sofa, drinking Cola and keeping time.

"Fine, I'm going to start counting down now. Mito doesn't have much time left."

"I know, so shut up!"

"Alright, you still have…"

"Enough!"

At the same time, Guren was sat at the dining table which was a bit further away.

"I say, you guys should give me back my…"

"I said keep quiet!" Mito loudly raged.

Actually, none of them know how to play Shogi. Maybe it's because since young, they didn't have the time to spend on this kind of activities, or maybe it was because they weren't allowed to play. Guren thought that since no one has played it before, they shouldn't have bought the game. However, Goshi insisted that they get it, and even specifically looked up how to play it, and they began playing in an elimination-style contest.

The first round, Goshi vs Guren. Guren was soundly defeated.

The second round, Shinya vs Mito. Mito is currently in an unfavourable situation.

Shinya whistled. "Hng hng~. I think you can't change the situation-"

"Please wait a bit, Shinya-sama."

"Contrary to what you may think, I can wait however long you want me to~ How many more seconds?"

Hearing Shinya's question, Goshi replied. "40 seconds."

"Hng hng hng hng hng~"

Mito groaned. She was concentrating very hard, her eyes opened wide. However, it was to no use. Shogi, if played properly, would have been fun and interesting. To thoroughly crush your opponents, one needs to have proper planning. Students like them, who have never even seen a Shogi manual but march straight into battle, can only resort to chance and create emergency measures as they go along.

When Goshi played against Guren, he had sucked his brain cells dry to find the fastest way to eradicate him without letting him know of his plans. This proved effective. Goshi's face when he won was full of joy.

Guren's rapid loss became a comforting point for Mito.

However, Shinya may have noticed Guren's deception.

Although he wants to end this silliness and get everyone to go home, Shinya and Mito's game seems to be continuing.

Shinya turned around and glanced at Guren, his smile laced with hidden meaning.

"……"

It is an expression that said that he had noticed why Guren lost.

"What a troublesome guy."

Shinya overheard Guren's muttering and let out a smile.

"Although I can't hear you, I know exactly what you're thinking about."

Goshi opened his mouth.

"20 seconds left~"

"Switch off the TV! I can't hear myself think!"

Hearing this, Goshi glanced at the TV and said.

"Just saying, this fire incident seems to be pretty serious."

They were still playing scenes from the fire on the TV. The reporter on site was speaking about something. The bystanders all turned their heads towards the burning apartment blocks, which had been reduced to a chunk of cement.

Suddenly, a woman from the ring of bystanders charged out.

She looked around 25, 26.

“Yuu! Yuuichiro!” The woman shouted.

This could be a mother that has left her child inside the building; a fireman rushed to stop her.

“Ma’am! Please calm down! Leave it to us!”

“Let go of me! Yuu! Yuu is still inside!”

“Oi! Turn the camera down there!! Can we film this?!”

The camera went closer. The mother’s face became clearer. She was rather pretty, but she was in a mess, her face strained with effort.

Goshi stopped timing. Mito also faced the TV screen. No, it should be said that everyone in the house was now staring at the TV.

The fireman shouted, “Can anyone come lend a hand? She’s too strong……Ma’am, please calm down!”

“Yuu! Yuuichiro!”

That mother seemed to be holding something in her hands. Since the camera was shaking, no one could clearly see what she was holding, but she raised her hand.

“Ma’am, please calm down……”

At that moment, the mother suddenly raised her hand and slapped the fireman.

“Ah…….what are you doing!?”

The fireman gripped onto her wrist. Her hand seemed to be holding something that is glittering and shining in the light. It seems to be a lighter. The fireman didn’t notice it. No, no one in the vicinity noticed.

The mother let out an agonizing scream.

“You must not put out the fire at all! He’s a demon! That child is a demon! I must kill him! I must kill him today!!!”

“Wha…what is going on with this lady!”

The lady raised her left hand, and in that hand was a bottle. The liquid from the bottle had soaked her.

“This lady is carrying gasoline!” The fireman shouted.

She pressed down on the lighter, however, the fire did not light. Another fireman raised his hand and smacked her to the ground as many other firemen came and held her firmly down.

The mother screamed loudly, “Demon! I must kill him! He must die!!!”

At that time, a man wearing a cloak neared the camera, his face flashed across the screen. Guren knew who that was.

Saito.

From《Hyakuya Sect》.

The guy who tried to attack Mahiru. Needless to say, the fire is linked to the《Hyakuya Sect》. It is very likely that the fire is deliberate. But if that fire is really a ploy of the《Hyakuya Sect》, the the TV would not be reporting on it. They would hide their links to the fire.

At that moment, the screen became pitch black. The camera switched back to the one in the recording studio. The lady presenter began to present the news in a flustered manner.

Regarding that shocking incident, it is all a mess.

Now that they have established the cause of the fire, they continue with the day’s news.

But, any news regarding this fire would not be mentioned anymore, or fake news would be reported instead.

Mito asked, “…… just now, what was that?”

Mito and Goshi probably didn’t recognise Saito. They wouldn’t have linked the fire to the 《Hyakuya Sect》.

For sure, Shinya must have noticed. No, 『Mikado no Oni』must have noticed as well.

Perhaps this news is already well known amongst them.

Like that incident in Ueno, 『Mikado no Oni』would have already checked for any links to the 《Hyakuya Sect》. Orders from Kureto would probably arrive soon.

Goshi said, “Well that puts a damper on things. I say, I forgot to keep time. Mito, have you finished thinking about your next move?”

Mito shook her head.

“I proclaim that Shinya-sama is the winner~, but before the next round starts, Guren”

“Hn?”

“I’m hungry.”

“Then get lost.”

Sayuri and Shigure haven’t come back yet. Tonight’s operation involves some skill. If they mess up, their relations with《Hyakuya Sect》 could be severed due to the fire.

However, looking from another viewpoint, if this interaction is a success, 『Mikado no Oni』would be fully focused on the fire, and their movements would not be as strictly monitored.

Then, what would be the correct way?

Shinya stood up.

“Fine, we should be going back already. I have some stuff to settle.”

Hiragi-sama finally spoke up. Perhaps he needed to go home to check on some things. For sure. He wouldn’t go to talk with the《Hyakuya Sect》without knowing anything.

After Shinya stood up, Mito and Goshi followed suit.

“Since Shinya-sama said he was going to leave.”

Mito stood up.

“We’ll do this again next time. And next time I won’t be forced into such a corner.”

She was seemingly talking about the Shogi game. Shinya smiled.

“Sure. I find this rather amusing. Next time we’ll play again.”

Everyone stood up. Shinya placed his handphone on the floor. Guren glanced at it, but didn’t make any attempt to remind him.

At the front door, Mito said. “…… We’re a team. I have some things I would like to say to Shigure and Sayuri, but”

Goshi continued, “Some people wanted to eat the food Sayuri prepared…… but it’s okay, there will be lots of time for that later on.”

“You’re planning to come again?”

“You’re not welcoming me? Then the next time you’ll be coming over to my place?”

Guren kept silent, but waved his hand in a manner that suggested that he wanted them to get going. Shinya pulled open the front door and said, “then we’ll be going now~”

And the three of them left.

Guren immediately closed the door and returned to the living room and picked up the phone that Shinya left behind. There was no password set up. He opened the SMS function, and there was one line of text.

『Really- looking at people’s phone without their permission……pervert Guren :) 』

“Still included that ‘smiley face’ huh.”

Guren muttered as he closed the app. He thought that there might be other information, but realised that there was nothing in the phone; it was empty.

Guren walked back to the front door.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. He opened the door to reveal Shinya's smiling face.

Shinya said, "I forgot my phone~"

Guren glanced at the phone held in his right hand.

"Did you see it?" Shinya asked.

"Who are you calling a pervert?"

"Ah ha ha."

"Did you purposely leave your phone behind?"

"Yep~. Did you purposely lose that match with Goshi?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Here we go again. Next time we'll see who wins. When that time comes, we'll see who can think deeper and plan more carefully and use better tactics. That'll settle it."

"Not interested."

"You're not allowed to escape from it~"

"What will doing this prove?"

"Hmm-, whether or not our words are true? Mahiru?"

"I'm becoming less and less interested."

"Really?"

Shinya smiled, "Haha, very well then……"

As he was talking to Guren, his was looking behind Guren. The TV was still on. Shinya's sight landed on the TV, the same one that Saito's image flashed across.

Purposely leaving his phone behind, then coming back to retrieve it, it's a set up to discuss about that incident. Who knows if he would still maintain contact with the 《Hyakuya Sect》.

"Anyway, what is the far-sighted and wise Guren-kun's opinion of this?"

Guren answered, "We shouldn't maintain contact. It's far too dangerous."

"Right. Perhaps."

"Go and investigate the cause of the fire. We need to understand the situation first."

"Yep yep~……neh, Guren."

"What."

"To fool a comrade by losing, won't people hate you? Do you plan to meet the《Hyakuya Sect》alone?"

Guren nodded.

"Because you're not a comrade."

"Ahaha. Looks like you really do plan to go."

There seems to be no other option than this.

There isn't enough information; without information one cannot advance. Even if there is a way to advance slowly, carefully, there isn't any time left.

The war between『Mikado no Oni』and《Hyakuya Sect》is gaining speed.

Perhaps in December there might be an event that ends the world.

Right now if one acts with a fear of danger, their lives would end.

Or maybe, it would fall apart before the battle field explodes.

Since it has come to this, one needs to act quickly.

Today, they have shown that they are willing to share information on《Hyakuya Sect》,《Kiju》, and the《Four Horsemen of John 》, and it's not just about the hybrid monster.

The reason is that Mahiru is a traitor.

Mahiru took a piece, and then vanished.

To the 《Hyakuya Sect》, it is very important scientific material, and they would like it back. Therefore for Guren to completely understand the full situation, he would like for the both of them to exchange information.

That is to say, 《Hyakuya Sect》doesn't know that Guren and the rest are holding on to Mahiru's piece.

Since it is like that, he needs to find out what exactly that strange thing was.

Perhaps that weird thing has no interest in humans, very few appear before normal people. Even the vampires are intrigued by it. 《Hyakuya Sect》, Mahiru, the Vampires, they are all fighting for it.

If this experimentation continues, what kind of power can it produce? Though with this thought ——

Guren glanced at Shinya.

Right now, a piece of this hybrid has been split into two, and Shinya has it.

One half has been sent to Aichi to allow the researchers to study it, but by and large, there isn't any progress.

The other half, how Shinya wants to use it, he himself doesn't know.

Guren asked, "……how's the research coming along?"

Shinya shook his head, interrupting him.

"That's your job, I don't have any research facilities, so I'm unable to check~"

Truthfully, regarding the research, he doesn't know anything as well.

Shinya's voiced was laced with dissatisfaction.

"I'm telling you, you already have very few comrades, and with formidable enemies to deal with, tricking people is very annoying~"

To this, Guren replied. "There has been no progress with the research. Maybe it's because to prevent the information from spreading, they used the fewest number of trustable people to study it. What that thing exactly is, right now no one knows. But……."

"Tonight's interaction with the 《Hyakuya Sect》, is it really necessary?"

Guren nodded, and at that exact moment, he heard Mito's voice.

"Shinya-sama, did you find your phone?"

Mito and Goshi were standing outside the door.

Shinya turned around and said, "Found it~. Don't know how it ended up under the sofa—"

Goshi smiled, "great that you found it."

Guren passed the phone to Shinya and said, "Then hurry up and leave."

"Leaving immediately~ This is really goodbye~"

Without waiting for Shinya to finish, Guren closed the door and turned back to the living room.

It is now 6.17 pm.

The news was still playing. No matter what channel it was, there was no more news related to the fire. It looks like they have started to control the media.

Guren suddenly thought about the mother covered in gasoline, the one with the messy appearance.

That mother was screaming that she needed to kill the demon.

"……demon." Guren said in a low voice.

What could 'demon' refer to?

It is definitely possible that the woman had gone mad and is spouting rubbish.

December.

The Christmas destruction.

Virus.

The angels of the apocalypse.

The Four Horsemen of John.

"…… There sure are many religious ways of saying it."

Actually, this really looks like something out of the holy books, or, it could actually be some code name for the virus and the attacks.

The TV was playing a commercial. The lady presenter was eating this new fried chicken with gusto.

Guren glanced at the commercial, and then turned his attention to the Shogi set left on the floor.

And with a little emotion, thought that it was good that Shogi could be so relaxed. The only enemy to defeat would be the guy seated in front of you.

Once you lay waste to their strategy, it is easy. Also, the enemy's force is the same as yours.

Rather, reality is very different.

Majority of the enemies have much more power than yourself, thus having the advantage as their influence stretches far and wide.

Therefore, whoever can form better alliances, whoever the enemy is, whoever turns traitor at a better time, whoever shows their sincerity to the other at a better time——

One careless step and the whole game is over.

Time and tide wait for no man.

"……"

Guren glanced at the Shogi set, picked up Mito's『Foot Soldier』piece, and moved it to the spot in front of Shinya's『General』.

If Mito moved the piece like that, she would lose. Shinya's next move would be able to take her 『General』.

This game has already been lost.

However, reality is not like that. Even if the leader dies, the followers are still alive.

Guren moved the 『Foot Soldier』one step.

And then killed off Shinya's『General』.

"……"

Kill off 《Haykuya Sect》's『General』.

Eliminate『Mikado no Oni』's『General』.

Since it is like that, even he is not afraid to die. Since he has already come to this decision, much less having even bigger ambitions. However, after that, how much has the situation changed? Would his companions die? After death, what kind of ambitions would he leave behind? To gamble he and his companion's lives, he would need a realistic goal. But what is a realistic goal?

"……"

Guren picked up the empty Cola bottle on the floor.

At this moment, the front door opened. Shigure and Sayuri have returned.

“We’re back~♪”

That was Sayuri’s voice. She walked from the hall to the living room, both hands full of grocery bags. She saw Guren picking up the bottle, and immediately rushed over.

“Ah! Please don’t do these kind of things! We’ll clean it up for you.”

She said as she grabbed the bottle from Guren.

Shigure also walked in and looked at Guren.

“We’re back.”

She lowered her head and began cleaning up the empty bags of chips on the dining table.

Guren looked at them cleaning up.

“……”

He thought, if both of them were interrogated, even tortured to the point of death, where would his sense of always moving forward go?

Of course, nothing can be stopped now. Everything has started. Even the research that the Hiragi family is not entitled to has begun.

Above all, if the world truly ends in December, then he would definitely not sit around waiting for his death.

Even so, he is still pondering over it.

“……”

What does he want to defend.

What does he cherish.

Shigure faced Guren, saying.

“That safe box that we always use.”

Guren nodded. In that safe box, there were some wards and combat clothing prepared.

Also, there are many things related to the curses. The spells the Hiiragi family don’t know of can be used to do a lot of things. Also, there are some that are custom made for Guren.

The Hiiragis may be nosy and investigate, and this apartment has too many things that the Hiiragis must not find out about.

Shigure continued.

“We……”

“Don’t come. I will go alone.”

“But”

“You guys would be a hindrance.”

“Oh……”

Shigure unwillingly closed her mouth.

Guren glanced at Shigure, and said.

“If by sunrise I’m not back …… You two go back to Aichi temporarily.”

Shigure and Sayuri both looked at Guren. They understood, Guren could die. By asking them to prepare the equipment, they should have already known.

With regard to the Ichinose family, even if Guren dies, it is of no matter. Guren still hasn’t become the head of the house yet.

Then, the only lives he can gamble with would be his own.

Sayuri glanced at Guren, putting on an air of cheerfulness.

"……Today, we'll be having curry chicken."

"Good, I look forward to it."

"But it's made on the spot so……"

"Whatever you do it's still good. Any food that you prepare has always been tasty."

He didn't know why Sayuri's cheeks turned red as she smiled happily. Whatever, it's all good.

"Shigure, I want to change. Help me prepare."

Shigure nodded,

"Yes."

After he finished speaking, he disappeared down the hallway.

Sayuri walked into the kitchen and put on an apron.

Guren glanced at her figure, and then glanced at his watch.

6.30pm.

From now to the meeting with the《Hyakuya Sect》, there is still 7.5 hours.

"I'll rest for a while."

Guren muttered to himself. He glanced at Sayuri, who was busy preparing the food.

"…… I'll rest after eating the curry." He corrected.

◆

1:30a.m.

Tokyo, Nerima

The meeting place with the《Hyakuya Sect》is at the Hikarigaoka park, which is quite large. It is near a train station that can be considered to belong to the park. However, if anyone enters from the side of the train station, it is possible that they can be captured by surveillance cameras.

So, Guren decided to ride a motorcycle and enter the park through the west entrance, travelling through dense vegetation and small forests that no one sees, crossing lawns in this dark place. No one noticed his presence.

Guren parked his motorcycle on one of the walkways in the park, shut off the engine and ensured it was parked properly. After removing his helmet, Guren looked towards the park. It was pitch black. The branches were so dense, even the moonlight could not pass through it.

He hooked his helmet on the motorcycle, then shifted the sports bag he was carrying on his back to the front, and stuck his hand in.

Guren extracted a pair of infrared goggles. In this dark park, it is a necessity. Then, he hid a large stack of wards in his sleeve. His pockets also concealed a few more. After making doing this, he slung his bag onto his back and tightened the straps, to avoid people grabbing on to it.

Just as Guren stepped down from his motorcycle, a motorcycle with a lot of horsepower drove to where he was.

The motorcycle stopped next to Guren's, so that the two were side by side.

It's Shinya.

After switching off the engine and taking off his helmet, Shinya's smile was all kinds of magnificent.

"……As expected, Guren also entered through here~. Since you saw a map, you would choose here to enter~"

Actually, if one looks at the map, they would realise that to sneak into the park, there was only one route to take, which is this one.

The trees grow thickly, and it is hard for anyone to see.

The arranged place to meet would be the east side of the tennis courts. As long as he is aware of the things happening at the west side as he advances, then he can secure an escape route at all times.

Guren answered, “They would think that we would be entering from this way.”

“Probably. That said, Guren. Do you have a licence to ride a motorcycle?”

“No.”

“Driving without a licence~. Then, that motorcycle is…?”

“Stolen.”

“As expected, you’d ride a stolen motorcycle.”

Guren smiled.

“And this is youth?”

After saying his piece, Guren put on the infrared night goggles. The darkness suddenly turned green.

Shinya stepped down from his motorcycle, his expression was one of helplessness.

“Putting on night vision goggles and sneaking into parks, that’s not the kind of youth I’d want. Anyways, are there any romantic couples here?”

“Oi, is it the time to be chit chatting?”

“Where are they, where are they~”

Guren ignored him and began walking towards the park.

“Eh… wait a minute. I want to come along too.”

Guren heard Shinya pulling on a pair of night vision goggles, but he didn’t turn around to look. After making sure that there weren’t any traps ahead, he began walking.

Shinya’s movements, they were faultlessly beautiful. He didn’t make a sound. Silent, discreet, but he moved fast. He must have undergone very strict training.

Shinya, from behind Guren, said.

“We still have some time, ready to lie low?”

Guren nodded.

“No need, I plan to watch from afar.”

“Agreed. The tennis courts are too open, it’s not suited for hiding~”

It is because of that reason that the tennis courts were chosen as a meeting place.

“Then, where should we observe them from?”

Guren didn’t answer, but glanced at his watch. The time is 1:38 a.m. There’s still 22 minutes to the meeting time.

Guren stopped walking.

The place that they stopped at was a small forest. The arranged meeting place in front of the lawn, and once you step on the lawn, there is no place to hide.

Since it is like that,

“……From the top of this tree.”

“Then we go peeping at couples?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re always ridiculing me~”

“Ridiculing you for what?”

“Up to you to decide~”

Guren began making preparations. From his pocket, he took out a few wards and stuck it on the branches he was going to climb up with. If he ran into enemies, these wards would be able to buy him some time. After he finished pasting them, he began to climb up and found a suitably thick and sturdy branch to use as a footing.

He heard a sound coming from the tree next to him; Shinya had also climbed up. Guren looked at his direction and saw Shinya waving at him, and then pointing towards the east, towards the tennis courts.

“……”

Guren nodded and turned his gaze towards that direction.Through the infrared goggles, the park at night seemed to be very bright.

The stars in the night sky were shining brightly, the starlight bathing the whole forest.

Guren turned up the goggle’s dynamometer, then adjusted the focal point to the target location.

Crossing the lawn, there is a tiny winding road. Just a bit in front and to the side of the path, there is a play ground.

In front of that, there is a wall. And that is where the tennis courts are.

There stood 8 men dressed in suits. It is very obvious they aren’t here for a secret rendezvous. They were all male, and it looks like they have been trained. They looked like the 《Hyakuya Sect》 members who attacked him at the First Shibuya High, wearing suits. If all of them had the same amount of skill as Saito, Guren and Shinya would immediately lose.

That is to say, this doesn’t look like a normal meet up to talk things over.

“……”

Guren glanced at his watch again.

The time now is 1:45 a.m.

There’s still 15 minutes.

Then, should they go and begin the talks?

Guren once again turned his attention to the 《Hyakuya Sect》 members.

Since it is like this, Guren noticed, that they were acting a little strange. The men in suits were yelling something, and frantically moving into a fighting formation.

Have they been discovered? Guren thought, immediately stiffening. However, it seems that they weren’t the cause of this commotion.

Something charged from the darkness and launched a surprise attack on a few of the men.

Faced with this unknown thing charging at them, a few of them reacted fiercely. From various places they took out chains. It seems that like Saito, they all have accepted the modifications. From the darkness, the chains rushed towards the unknown things like a beast let out of it’s cage——

The thing easily dodged the chains and grabbed one of the men’s hair. It pulled him down. He did the same thing to two other men, throwing them to the ground.

It then caught hold of one of the fleeing men’s hair and then bit into his neck. The man was so terrified that he couldn’t stop shaking; he had lost all his will to battle.

It looks like that thing is drinking the man’s blood.

“……It’s a vampire.”

Guren groaned in a low voice.

The vampire in front of them having a slaughter fest was of a totally different class from the vampires in Ueno. From the clothing, it doesn’t look like a noble. But it definitely isn’t human. If that thing really is a vampire, then the《Hyakuya Sect》 would lose without a doubt.

Vampires far outclass humans.

Furthermore, vampires have the advantage as they are fighting in pitch darkness——

“……”

In a flash, the fight was over.

The vampire killed off all the《Hyakuya Sect》members.

Guren witnessed the fight without moving a single muscle. After it ended, he pondered over what had happened.

What just happened?

Why were the《Hyakuya Sect》members killed?

Vampires have no interest towards humans. They only see them as livestock, and they shouldn’t have much interest towards the fights between men.

Then why are they appearing more often?

Just now, what exactly happened?

The vampire shouldn’t have noticed their location. It was quite far away. But, if they didn’t come here to observe the place but directly went to the talks, they would be dead. Thinking until this point, Guren couldn’t help but feel a chill in his spine.

“……”

All of a sudden, the vampire turned towards their direction.

It was female.

A female with long hair.

She was staring fixedly at their direction

But, that’s impossible. They were so far away, she couldn’t have noticed them.

But, the lady smiled. Her mouth was dripping with fresh blood. She had pointed fangs. She prepared herself to sprint over,

“Oi, Guren!!”

From the other tree, Shinya shouted.

“I know!”

Guren jumped down from the tree. He ripped off his infrared goggles to prevent his vision from being impaired.

Then he started running with all his might.

He sprinted out of the forest and ran out of the park.

Then he took out the keys to the motorcycle.

Guren sprinted all the way to his motorcycle, and with his fastest speed shoved the key into the keyhole and began frantically turning it, violently kicking it to get the engine going.

At the moment the engine started, the vampire rushed towards him.

He turned the accelerator. The 1100cc motorcycle flew forward. The front wheel hit the vampire.

Despite that, the vampire managed to grab onto the front wheel on the motorcycle, and she smiled.

“Detestable.”

The vampire’s nails pierced the front wheel, and it exploded with a loud noise.

As he fell off the motorcycle, he pulled out a katana that was strapped to his waist. He brought it down with a wide slash. The vampire easily evaded it. However, both of them knew that the attack would not connect. The vampire grabbed the motorcycle and prepared to smash it on him.

He can’t escape.

Death……

“Guren, grab my hand!”

Shinya hollered. Guren stretched his hand towards the sound of his voice. His outstretched hand was forcefully pulled. Guren was being dragged along by Shinya’s speeding motorcycle. Guren stumbled for a bit, before successfully jumping onto the

backseat of the motorcycle.

The vampire hurled Guren's motorcycle, but it hit a passing-by taxi. The taxi flipped over a few times.

The mess was already beyond anyone's comprehension.

The vampire continued to chase. From his sports bag, Guren took out a few wards and threw them behind him.

The moment the wards made contact with the ground, they exploded. One of the explosions managed to burn off the vampire's leg. However, the leg began regenerating. The wards are totally useless against this kind of vampire. Despite her clothes burning, she didn't try to put the fire out. Once her regenerated leg touched the ground, she began moving again.

Seeing this, Guren said to Shinya, who's back was facing him as he drove the motorcycle,

"……Shinya."

"Yeah?"

"It might catch up to us."

"Are you serious!? We're already going faster than 70 miles (about 112 km) per hour……"

"It's coming."

Guren's words had barely left his mouth, when the vampire jumped at them, almost flying straight at them. That action wasn't so agile as when she was fighting just now. In order to shake her off, they had to go over 100 km/h and flee for their lives.

Shinya continued to accelerate.

But even so, the vampire's hand touched the motorcycle.

However, if they can pull off the next attack, then there's still a chance to flee. Once the vampire drops from the air, it needs to touch the ground to get back in the air. At that instance, it's speed should drop.

The motorcycle can still accelerate.

One attack.

If it can dodge this attack.

"……"

Guren held the katana in his right hand, and with his left, grabbed onto Shinya's shoulder.

He took a deep breath, then exhaled heavily.

The vampire's hand stretched towards them.

Guren swung the katana.

The vampire wanted to grab hold of the katana. But the blade must not be caught. She cannot be allowed to latch on. The katana must cut through. Guren didn't allow the vampire's hand to touch him, and with effort, he slashed down with all his might.

If it didn't hit, they are dead.

If the katana was caught, then it's death as well.

So,

"……damn it, cut through!"

Guren yelled. The vampire's fingers still haven't touched the blade.

It's arm was cleanly sliced into two.

"Good! It cut through! Shinya, move!"

"I'm already moving as fast as I can!"

The vampire looked at its severed arm, but it seemed to pay it no mind.

However, it seems that she doesn't want to continue the chase anymore.

She dropped to the ground and glanced at Guren.

The motorcycle sprinted off at terrifying speeds; running away from the vampire. The speed has already crossed the 150km/h mark. But if they slow down, the vampire might change its mind about chasing them.

There is a need for the vampire to stop chasing them—— but with this current speed it is impossible to turn corners. Furthermore, if anyone falls off the motorcycle that is moving at this speed, it is a certain death.

Guren grabbed Shinya's shoulders and turned around. He saw the red light flash, but the motorcycle couldn't stop.

There was a huge truck speeding towards them after the right turn.

In front of them there were a few taxis.

Shinya was preparing to weave through the vehicles——

He shouted.

"Guren, hold on tight!"

"Today really is a terrible day."

Even though he said this, his left hand still held on tightly to Shinya's body.

The side mirror scraped against the truck, shattering. Shards of glass flew towards Guren's face. He immediately used the blade of the katana to shield his eyes, but a shard had sliced his forehead. There was that feeling of skin being split open.

But then, the skirmish was over.

"……"

The vampire didn't chase them.

Maybe it was because of the time, the roads were all empty and it allowed them to travel at the speed they were going at. But after this, the vampire shouldn't be pursuing them anymore.

Therefore the question right now is,

"……eh, Shinya. Slow down. If the police catch us, it'll be troublesome."

Guren said.

At this, Shinya asked.

"The vampire?"

"It looks like it let us go."

"Really—, are you joking? That's great!"

"Then hurry up and slow down."

When Shinya heard this, he smiled lightly.

"But, we're not wearing helmets and you're holding a katana…… going slowly or not, we'll still be caught~ Are you going to say that you're a mobster from that era?"

Hearing this, Guren eyed the katana in his hand and smiled.

"……yeah, I agree……but, we barely escaped with our lives, and I refuse to die due to your poor driving skills."

"Nothing will happen."

"Aren't you driving without a license?"

"Under these circumstances, driving without a license doesn't matter. However, if we slow down, we're going to be quite conspicuous~. You're wrapped around me, we're not wearing helmets, and both of us are guys, what does this look like?"

"Cut your nonsense, hurry up and slow down."

"Yep yep~"

Shinya slowed down the motorcycle, and then turned into a small alley and parked the motorcycle.

“Are you sure it didn’t chase us?”

Hearing Shinya’s query, Guren nodded.

“Probably.”

“If it’s just probably then it’ll be hard.”

“Then you can make a trip back to check.”

“No thanks. Guren,”

“Eh?”

“Didn’t you get hurt?”

Shinya glanced at Guren’s forehead, and said.

“Was it the vampire?”

Guren got off the motorcycle, answering.

“No, it’s because your driving sucks, it caused me to be attacked by flying mirrors.”

“Ahahaha, that. You should have dodged it~”

Guren didn’t hear what he was saying, and touched the wound on his forehead. It was bleeding quite a bit.

This blood has already been cursed. If this blood is injected into Mitsuki’s hand, she would turn into a monster that has no control over her actions.

Although he doesn’t how much blood needs to be orally ingested, or injected, for the curse to be transferred; even getting close to the blood would be dangerous.

Guren sheathed his sword and then opened his sports bad and pulled out a bandage.

At this moment, Shinya said.

“Let me help you with that……”

“No need. I can do it myself.”

“But you can’t see the wound on your forehead.”

Guren ignored him and balled the bandage, putting pressure on the wound.

“How rough. If you don’t bandage it properly, it would scar~”

“It would? Thanks for the concern.”

“But then how can you be married off~?”

“Ah—, I got it, I got it. You’re so noisy, shut up.”

“Ahahaha~”

After he finished laughing, he let out a sight to ease his frayed nerves.

“……However, that was really dangerous. What was that? Why did the vampire suddenly appear?”

“How would I know?”

“The guys from the《Hyakuya Sect》were all killed.”

Guren glanced at his watch.

It was finally the time that they had arranged to meet the《Hyakuya Sect》; 2 in the morning.

However, they cannot go back to the park to meet the 《Hyakuya Sect》since all the《Hyakuya Sect》members are dead, and the vampire could be anywhere.

Under these circumstances, they were still alive, and that in itself is a mystery.

It must be due to their good luck.

If they hadn't had such good luck, they probably wouldn't have gotten out alive.

The vampires are something that humans cannot beat. If the vampires really have plans to kill humans, it would be too easy. However, they somehow have been spared by that vampire.

No, perhaps it can be said that the vampire wasn't really after them.

After all, to the vampires, humans are but a bunch of noisy livestock, one more or one less doesn't matter to them.

Therefore vampires rarely interact with humans; there are no signs of them anywhere.

"……"

However, the vampires have been appearing more often. It looks like that vampires aren't happy with the experimentation carried out by the 《Hyakuya Sect》.

One of the vampires Mahiru had interacted with before, Ferid, had said something to that effect.

『How frightening. It's a shame that humans still want to continue with this kind of thing. If humans end up fiddling with the forbidden curse, then the world would end pretty soon.』

The forbidden curse could end the world.

That is to say, the《Hyakuya Sect》must be hiding some secret about the forbidden curse within that piece of the hybrid monster.

Also, the vampires hate it.

They hate the lustful humans, who would end up destroying the world.

Shinya, who probably was thinking about the same thing, asked.

"If the vampires are really eyeing the《Hyakuya Sect》, then even they would be destroyed?"

Probably.

However,

"Do you think that the《Hyakuya Sect》are prepared to take on the vampires? They should know that they can't fight the vampires."

If the vampires really command the 《Hyakuya Sect》to stop their research on the forbidden skills, the《Hyakuya Sect》would have to comply.

Shinya said,

"……then, what was that? Why did the vampires suddenly appear?" No idea. No, in fact, the things that they know are more than the things they don't know. Desire and lust are the things that connect the different groups, it is hard to see the truth.

However,

"……"

Shinya looked here. Guren knows what he is thinking about; who's the one in the shadows pulling the strings. The person who allowed《Hyakuya Sect》and 『Mikado no Oni』to clash; both of them now know who it is.

"……"

Unfortunately, Mahiru is in the center of everything.

Hiragi Mahiru secretly planned it all.

Of course, they didn't know if what happened today was part of her plan.

"……if we continued to be blur, the whole thing would have been settled without us hearing anything about it."

Shinya said tiredly.

Guren understood his meaning. Because Mahiru was running about in such far locations, only looking at her back can be tiring.

Guren brought down the bandage that he was using. The wound had stopped bleeding. Fortunately, the wound was close to his hairline, and as long as he let his fringe down, it would be covered.

Guren put his blood soaked bandage into his sports bag, then started walking.

Shinya asked,

“How strange~ and where might you be going?”

Guren answered,

“Home.”

“And you’re walking?”

“Is there any other way? Continue to ride without a helmet?”

“Yeah~”

After hearing this, Shinya also got off the motorcycle, and tossed it aside. It looks like Shinya’s motorcycle is also stolen property.

“However, we’re still around Nerima right? It’s still around 20km from Shibuya.”

“So?”

“Let’s go steal a bicycle then~. Well, we’ll find our own ways back?”

“Of course.”

“Then, we’ll end off here?”

“Yeah.”

Guren said without looking back.

Shinya then continued.

“Then, see you in school tomorrow.”

“I know.”

“Good night~”

Hearing this, Guren stopped and turned around.

He glanced at Shinya, who was waving at his retreating figure, and said.

“Shinya,”

“Yes~?”

“……”

“What is it?”

Guren looked at Shinya and said,

“……Thanks for today. If not for you, I would be dead.”

Hearing this, Shinya was a little surprised.

“Eh? Eh? And what does that mean~ Are you……”

Guren interrupted him.

“No, I’m not thanking you. Without me, you will be dead.”

“Ah, that is true~”

However, Shinya didn’t need to save him. When he was attacked by the vampire, riding the motorcycle and grabbing him by then hand just to save him was a very big risk. He should have just saved himself.

But Shinya didn't do that

Therefore correspondingly,

"……a little, I can trust you a little now."

Hearing this, Shinya smiled bitterly.

"A little?"

"Yeah. A little."

"Now that really is a thank you. That's all?"

"Yes."

"Then, see you tomorrow."

"Yeah, see you."

Saying this, Guren began walking towards Shibuya.

◆

He was gone for three hours.

Shigure and Sayuri didn't go to sleep at all.

When they saw Guren enter from the door,

"Guren-sama!"

Both looked like they were about to cry as they dashed over.

Guren looked at both of them and said,

"……Why are both of you wearing sleepwear? Didn't I say that if I didn't come back by morning both of you are to return to Aichi?"

He didn't finish his sentence when Shigure interrupted.

"No, Guren-sama would return alive."

"You ah, there is still a certain degree to disobeying orders……"

This time, Sayuri interrupted him. Sayuri lifted her head to get a good look at him, and tears started pouring out from her eyes

"Waaaaaaah~ Guren-sama, why are you covered in blood?!!!"

With tears streaming down her face, she opened her arms to give him a hug, but Guren stopped her by grabbing her arm.

"……don't come over. My blood has been contaminated."

"I don't care!"

"But I do. Shigure, go take a bath. Wash off the blood."

Shigure didn't move an inch. Her eyes were still full of tears.

"……waah~.I'm so sorry……It's our fault, we're too weak."

Sayuri glanced at the wound on Guren's forehead, and then began crying even more.

"……We were so worried, if you didn't come back, what would we do? It's our fault, we're too weak, we couldn't help Guren-sama……"

At this, Guren, who was still standing at the entrance, replied wearily,

"Ah? What are you saying……?"

Shigure said,

"When Guren-sama was out there risking his life, at the very least, we should have been there right by his side. We hated

staying at home and waiting. Even if we don't have the strength and we're unable to assist you……at the very least, we still could have helped you block the blows."

As she was saying this, her voice became more steady. She rarely cries, but this time, her tears were flowing without end.

This time, looks like she was really worried about him.

With another loud 'waaah', both of them ran up and hugged him.

"……Both of you are idiots. Didn't I say not to get close to me……"

Both of them hugged Guren tightly. Maybe it was because the blood was dried when it touched them, since nothing happened. With this dosage, nothing happened. If it's just through contact, then the demon won't be transmitted? Maybe it was the dosage that affects it. Are there any conditions to be met for one to be infected?

Even so,

"……you guys, I already said that you shouldn't get close to me, so don't. Go back to Aichi and get a check-up."

Sayuri lifted her head and looked at Guren, saying,

"Ah, is Guren-sama coming with us!?"

"No, I'm staying here."

Shigure then said,

"Then we'll stay right by Guren-sama's side……"

"What kind of joke is this, both of you. Listen to orders."

"No."

"I'm not going."

“I’m getting angry.”

“Waaaah~”

It looks like both of them were about to cry again.

Guren looked at the two who refused to leave his side, and thought.

“……”

Looking at them, he couldn’t help but think that it was good foresight not to bring them along.

If he had brought them both along, they would be dead.

No doubt.

Regarding these, he did think about it deeply.

Regarding the deaths of his friends.

Regarding his powerless self.

Mahiru was able to give up her friends.

Shinya did mention this before.

『It's impossible for you to become like Mahiru. However, that doesn't mean that you're weak. If you had made the same decisions that Mahiru made, then I think we wouldn't have the need to save her.』

Is that true?

Is that not the excuse of the weak?

Sayuri and Shigure are willing to disregard their lives for Guren.

Is that weakness or strength?

Doing things not for your own goals or ambitions, but for someone else that you stake your life, is that weakness or strength?

"……Hey. How long are you going to hug me. I'm tired. I want to shower and then sleep."

As his voice petered out, Sayuri and Shigure shared a look. For whatever reason, both of their faces turned red. Sayuri then said,

"……ah, then, let me help you scrub your back……"

"Shut up."

Guren interrupted her.

After his shower, it was already past 4 a.m.

In a few hours, there would be incredible things at school. Then at lunch he would be summoned by Kureto. So it is a must to rest.

"……Really, how annoying."

Guren muttered into his pillow as he fell into bed, but he did not manage to sleep at all.

Volume 3 Chapter 4

It's morning.

A normal classroom in First Shibuya High.

The fourth lesson of the day was a self-study block. Having the self-study block placed right before the afternoon break meant a longer break time for all students. Thus, a lot of students have already left the classroom.

Even though that was the case, there were no slackers in this school. If it was time for self-study, everyone would be engaged in some form of learning. If anyone did not do well in the regular sorcery exams, they faced the possibility of expulsion. On top of that, students were also forcefully pitted against each other; a slight bit of carelessness could result in death.

That's why, everyone was putting in their best effort.

It was rumored that if one received recognition here, they would be given high-ranking positions in <Mikado no Oni>. Thus, everyone shouldered the hopes and dreams of their loved ones and worked hard.

Half the class had left the classroom.

Guren didn't budge. Put it in another way, he was suffering from a lack of sleep.

Shinya, who was sitting beside, was slumped against the table and currently in dreamland. He probably didn't get much rest as well. However, in a school crawling with enemies, Guren would definitely not want to doze off.

Guren looked enviously at the soundly asleep Shinya through heavy-lidded eyes before looking outside the window.

From his peripheral vision, he saw an annoying redhead approaching.

It was Mito.

In her hand was a shogi set. Perhaps, she was here to have a shogi match?

As she approached, Mito hid the shogi set behind her back. Just as Guren was wondering if he should expose the fact that he caught her hiding it,

"UWAHHHH~"

he yawned and forgot about the matter.

Mito asked.

“What’s wrong? Not enough sleep?”

“Yeah.”

“Taking care of one’s body is also the duty of a follower of <Mikado no Oni>. You must adhere to that.”

Indeed, she was annoying. If Guren retorted, it would be troublesome. So, he just nodded. Either way, he was too drowsy and wished to exit this boring conversation.

Thus,

“Yeah, I’ll reflect on that.”

Guren replied. Mito was slightly surprised at that.

“Ah……er, about that.”

Wearing a delighted expression on her face, Mito said.

“Fi, Finally, you understood. That’s right. That’s the kind of humility we’re looking for. For us students who serve under the Hiiragi House…..”

Mito enthusiastically continued.

So sleepy. Guren allowed Mito to continue that sleep-inducing speech.

Just then, Mito came closer.

“……About that.”

“Eh?”

“Yesterday….”

“Yesterday?”

Mito frowned in slight embarrassment,

“Yester, yesterday was fun.”

What was she talking about? Talking about this seemed to have made her feel embarrassed.

Mito’s casual talk triggered Guren’s memory of yesterday’s events. For Guren, being chased and nearly killed by a vampire was the most unforgettable incident that occurred.

“Really?”

“Aye, well…….you didn’t find it fun?”

She looked a little lonely. Her facial expressions betrayed the fact that she had hoped he found yesterday fun.

Guren replied.

“Ah, not bad. Perhaps, it was quite enjoyable.”

“You’re, you’re right about that!”

She brightened up instantly. Her expressions were very easy to read.

“Indeed, being partners serving under Kureto-sama, that kind of interaction and bonding is very important.”

Even though I disagree, I guess I’ll just yield to her.

“Yeah.”

“Thus, I wonder if we could get together sometime in the near future. That would be….”

“Alright.”

“About that.”

“Alright.”

Suddenly, Mito’s eyes became pointy as she glared at Guren.

“……you’re just playing along right?

She dug her own grave, finally arriving at this conclusion. Indeed, it’s all thanks to the lack of sleep.

“Horrible. That kind of attitude…..”

“Stop chattering it’s annoying.”

“That was not annoying! Guren, listen up. That was for your benefit…..”

“Ah—yes yes, I know.”

“You don’t, you….”

“Mito.”

“What?”

“I had lots of fun yesterday. I have never experienced that before. Shogi was also more interesting that expected and the chips were tasty…..and? Anything else I missed out?”

“Aye, er, you….really had fun?”

“Yeah.”

That was not a lie.

Drinking coke, eating chips and passing time without a care in the world was indeed enjoyable. Furthermore, both Goshi and Mito were idiots. Idiots who proclaimed that they want to assist Guren just because he saved their lives.

Perhaps Shinya was no different. Risking his life to save Guren.

“……”

Companions.

Squad.

Harmony— under the state of being divided into the Ichinose House and Hiiragi House, Guren didn’t know if all that boring bonding sessions had any value. However, the more meaningless it got the more,

“…..Yeah. Indeed. Probably was fun.”

As he said this, Mito brightened up even more. She joyfully replied.

“…..Right? Right? Team bonding and harmony is indeed important!”

In general, her personality is idiotically straightforward. An ojou-san who wishes to repay me for saving her life.

She remained delighted as she took out the shogi set from behind her back.

“Look. I bought this this morning at the convenient store because we haven’t played against each other yet. Want to have a match?”

Guren wanted to refuse due to drowsiness. But he cannot sleep in this school.

So, he accepted her request.

“Where are we playing this?”

Thus, the student sitting in front of Guren hurriedly stood up.

“Ju, Jujo-sama. Please sit here.”

“Thank you.”

She rightfully sat down and placed the shogi board on Guren’s desk.

Goshi approached from the middle of the classroom.

“Oh, continuing what we left off yesterday?”

Shinya, who was supposed to be asleep, spoke without lifting his head.

“…..Is Guren going to show his true colors today? If he is then I’ll be watching.”

Hearing that, Goshi said,

“Heh? Yesterday, you didn’t play seriously?”

Shinya answered.

“He totally didn’t. Because Guren is a dirty cheat……”

Goshi stood beside the table and said.

“So I had been underestimated. Then let us have a rematch. Let me see your true colors. Mito, move.”

Mito replied.

“No, it’s my turn today.”

Alas, Shinya lifted his head up.

“No, if Guren intends to take this seriously, then I’ll be his opponent~”

Seeing this, Mito and Goshi looked at each other and gave up.

Guren looked at the still sleepy Shinya and said,

“……What’s the meaning of this?”

Shinya smiled as he replied.

“Guren, Kureto-nii would be calling you over during afternoon break. Thus, I feel that you should meet him fully awake.”

“So you want to wake me u

Of course, Mahiru's moral decay had already started since the moment she betrayed the Hyakuya Sect. Or perhaps, the news of the betrayal itself was a lie, perhaps Mahiru was still working with the Hyakuya Sect. Then was the news about Mahiru betraying the Hiragi House released by Mahiru too?

This was an incomprehensible truth. No one knew what the correct answer was.

Even though Guren had no inkling, he was still forced into a position where a single wrong answer could result in his death.

He spoke.

"Firstly, did you easily believe what the Hyakuya Sect said?"

"Huh?"

"I'm asking, did the Hiragi House easily believe the enemies' words especially when now is war?"

Kureto replied.

"No, I only believe what I see with my own two eyes. That's why I did not kill you and Shinoa. There is a need to confirm what the Hyakuya Sect is planning by revealing this. I do not intend to be thrown off by this war on information. Well, the messenger sent by the Hyakuya Sect was too roused up by the interrogator and died."

As Kureto spoke, he cast his glance to the surroundings.

The neighboring room.

It was the one in which Guren was being interrogated with Kureto waiting beside. Bright red liquid seeped through the wall separating the two rooms. The lingering smell of blood seemed to be from the corpse in the neighboring room.

"…..Are you happy to let a child see this?"

Guren spoke. Kureto smiled.

"The Ichinoses are so gentle. That is why you cannot win against us."

"……..Never intended to win in the first place."

"Haha, I like this side of you Guren. This self-aware side of you."

Guren walked forward and stood behind Shinoa. Petting her head, he released the constraints

on her.

Shinoa was released.

She looked at Kureto.

"……can I stand up?"

Kureto shook his head at her question.

"Sit down."

"……."

Guren looked at Shinoa. Looked at her skinny legs. She suffered severe injuries: her nails were removed, her skin was cracked. It looked like she could not stand up.

Kureto spoke.

"These wounds are merely make-up. I didn't actually interrogate Shinoa. Even though we share different parents, I will never meaninglessly interrogate such a cute little sister, Guren. Anyway, she won't reveal anything."

With that, Shinoa stood up and snickered.

Kureto said.

"Didn't I tell you to sit down?"

"Putting up with such a boring act, I'm a little tired."

"No, we need to continue. We'll call Shinya later. Don't remove the makeup."

"……."

Shinoa looked a little confused and troubled. Guren hoped to gain some new insights from those eyes, but it was useless.

Guren said.

"So from the very start, this is a test?"

Kureto shook his head.

"No, it is to just gather information. In the face of tough enemies, the truth is muddy."

"Then, the conclusion?"

“I’ll trust you. You are indeed an important subordinate of mine.”

Kureto replied.

But, Guren did not know why. Did not know from which part of the conversation Kureto drew this conclusion from.

Just then,

“Don’t understand?”

Kureto asked.

His cold eyes seemed to have read Guren’s thoughts.

Guren remained a poker face. Just that, his finger twitched a little. To prepare for any unforeseen circumstances. To allow his hand to reach for his katana immediately.

But Kureto did not budge.

He coldly said.

“…….I am already informed of you and Shinoa’s meeting. So I’ll kill Shinoa first.”

“….What”

Shinoa reacted instantly. Kureto reached out and grabbed Shinoa’s neck.

At the same time, Guren drew his sword and charged towards Kureto.

Kureto responded smoothly by unsheathing half of his katana and blocking Guren’s attack.

:…..Don’t move or Shinoa’s spinous processes will be fractured.”

“…..”

Guren blocked Kureto’s attack with his blade and halted his movements.

Kureto smiled.

“Haha, that face. This is why I trust you. You, who is unable to abandon Shinoa, who is so humane. By the way, I have also passed the sentence on Hiragi Shinoa. And told the Hyakuya Sect, in a way that only those who spy on the Hiragi House would understand, her sentencing. Ah, but I withheld the information from you and Shinya. Well, moving on, how do you think things will progress from here?”

Guren glared at him.

Kureto's motive in announcing this is easy to understand. It was a trap to lure Hiragi Mahiru out.

But,

"Are you being ignored by Mahiru?"

Hearing that, Kureto smiled again. Letting go of Shinoa, he tucked his hands into his pockets. He took out his phone, showing a screen with a newly-received SMS.

The sender was unknown.

The topic was <Hiragi Mahiru>.

The body read: Do whatever you want.

Guren looked at the screen. He looked at Mahiru's message. Mahiru, who was able to calmly abandon her sister.

No, whether that was the truth, Guren did not know. There were way too many lies floating around in this world. It was no longer possible to discern the truth.

But maybe, that was really from Mahiru.

She could do this.

She had enough in her to do this.

At least, when Guren met her at Ueno, she looked like she had already been deprived of all common sense and morality by the demon possessing her. So much so, she could really do something like this.

Shinoa looked at the phone. She looked like she was in a dilemma. Tears filled up her eyes as she, for the first time, let out an expression of an eight year old girl.

Abandoned by her sister.

Abandoned by a sister she so staunchly believed in.

But immediately, she regained her composure. That expression of dilemma vanished. But in front of Kureto, it was too late.

Kureto withdrew his sword.

Guren stepped back.

Seeing that there was no need to fight anymore. Kureto sheathed his sword.

As he continued, he had an expression that seemed to convey the fact that he was tired of all this and was treating this whole incident as a joke.

“So annoying. Very shocking indeed right? I never revealed my address to her. Since when did my address get leaked out?”

“……..”

“And such control. How smart. Troubling me with one single SMS. Can I kill Shinoa? Can I kill Guren? Can I kill Shinya? Who is the enemy, who is the ally? Until where did she orchestrate the whole scene? Aren’t I walking into her plans? I started late. The school was attacked by the Hyakuya Sect, resulting in many sacrifices. This progressed completely according to her plans.”

“……”

“How annoying, she is as scary as before. Totally different from you. You who drew your sword immediately when the sister of your lover was about to be killed. But this is exactly why I trust you. You who is humane and will never betray your comrades. You are not the centre of the story. Because you are an idiotic trash being used by that woman.”

“…….”

“By the way Guren, you have already met up wit Mahiru right?”

Guren did not reply.

But Kureto seemed to have not notice that.

“No need to answer anyway. I won’t trust anything you say. But let me warn you, don’t ever trust her. She is a very beautiful……..monster, Guren.”

Monster.

Indeed, perhaps it was true.

But, he could not understand why she turned into something like this. During their childhood days, she was only a cute little girl. Even though she seemed rather majestic, she was nonetheless a girl afraid of loneliness.

That day.

That bright and sunny day, after being abducted, what exactly happened to her body?

Kureto continued.

“However, if you could control that monster……help me tell her something. That woman is very loyal to you. Perhaps she’ll listen.”

Guren replied.

“…..What do you want me to say?”

Kureto said.

“Come back to the Hiragi House. I don’t mind a marriage between Mahiru and Guren.”

“What? Why do you want me to marry Mahiru?”

“Aren’t you lovers?”

“That was a childhood thing.”

“She likes you.”

“What is it got to do with m…..”

Kureto interrupted.

“Anything is fine. But if you intend, even if a little, to save her, then marry her Guren. I can allow that.”

“…….”

“I was never interested in our pasts anyway. I see no problem with the marriage between a Hiragi and a Ichinose. So boring, I’ve had enough of inefficient battles. If everyone becomes my subordinate, I’ll accept you all. That’s why Guren, if you find her, then hold her near, don’t ever let her go again.”

“…….”

“Or kill her. If not, she will bring bad luck to those around her. Do you want to know the casualty count of the attack by the Hyakaya Sect?”

Guren shook his head.

“Not interested.”

“Will an uninterested fellow save his comrades? Goshi and Mito are all showering you with praises. They say you are trustworthy, you are gentle and that you are a good person.”

Under such circumstances, he couldn’t be sure if that was them praising him or making fun of him.

“That’s why today, I spared your life. Because you are different from Mahiru. You have good self-control. For someone who value his comrades, you are not a threat. You are someone who is subservient. Also, you can only unleash your true powers when being used by others.”

Guren looked at Kureto. Everything he said was true. The present him would never be able to topple the Hiragi House.

Guren spoke.

“…….you know you are quite talkative. Publicly announcing your opinions, what are you nervous about?”

Kureto smiled.

“There are 2 people currently linked to Mahiru. These words will definitely be heard by Mahiru right?”

In other words, Kureto was talking to Mahiru.

Kureto turned his gaze to Shinoa. Shinoa was listening intently; she seemed to be in a trance.

Guren sheathed his sword.

“Reply her SMS. I don’t even know how to contact her.”

“Haha, but she won’t listen to me right?”

“Then do you think she’ll listen to me?”

“Compared to me, there’s a higher possibility of persuading her right?”

Kureto typed a few keys on his phone. Next, Guren’s phone beeped.

Guren took out his phone and saw Kureto’s message. What was written on it was an IP address he had never seen before.

That must be Mahiru’s IP address.

“This is an order. Meet her and persuade her.”

“What if I don’t want to?”

“I repeat, this is an order.”

Guren glanced at his phone again and asked.

“Kureto, I need to ask you something.”

“What?”

“Who is stronger? You or Mahiru?”

Kureto directly replied.

“Mahiru.”

“……”

“……”

“She is a prodigy. A prodigy who does not understand another’s pain should not lead the organization.”

Guren smiled at Kureto.

“In other words, you can understand one’s pain?”

“Compared to her. That’s why, I can understand your feelings, Guren. I can understand the feeling of being trampled on by others. How tiring.”

“What nonsense.”

Guren sighed and looked at his phone.

Even until now, he did not know if this IP address and the content of the SMS Kureto received from Mahiru were real. There was a high possibility that all these were lies planned to provoke Guren and Shinoa.

But if despite all these, everything was real—- then it could only be concluded that Mahiru was indeed a monster.

Kureto spoke.

“…..Then, you can start now. Reply her SMS.”

“……I’ll make this clear beforehand. Even if you hope for me and Mahiru to….”

“Alright send the message now.”

Kureto ordered.

Guren started typing.

The content of the message was: I am Guren. Reply me.

That’s all.

He pressed the ‘Send’ button.

There was no reply.

Guren looked up at Kureto.

“Satisfied?”

Kureto silently nodded.

“Once there was contact, inform me at once. And tell Mahiru not to mistake the who the enemy is. The Hiragi House is not her enemy.”

“If you are not her enemy, then she’ll not betray you anymore?”

“To let her know this. That is your task Guren. Under my command, stop that that woman. That love-addict who is broken and hovering on the edge of confusion.”

Kureto replied.

Guren glanced at his phone again and stuffed it back into his pocket.

“.,,,,That’s it?”

Kureto nodded.

“You are right. You can leave now.”

Shinoa looked towards Guren, but her gaze was wandering. Although he was unsure what she was thinking, it was too dangerous to meet her gaze. Kureto would notice no matter how small and subtle it was.

Guren was going to leave the room.

But just then, a phone rang. It was Guren’s phone. Everyone’s gaze was directed at the phone.

Guren whipped out his phone. It was an unknown number.

“Is this Mahiru?”

Kureto asked.

Guren shrugged.

“It might be a spam call from some advertisers.”

“Pick it up.”

“……..”

He had no other choice. A voice rang out from the other side.

A clear feminine voice.

“Who’s that?”

“I was going to say that.”

With that, the identities of both the speaker and caller were exposed. It was indeed Mahiru.

She sounded happy.

“Oh, you are still alive?”

“Don’t kill me without permission. Also, why did you obtain my number?”

“Because I like you.”

“Cut that out.”

“Ah Haha.”

She giggled merrily. As if she was indeed very delighted to be talking with Guren.

“Is Shinoa still alive?”

“She’s beside.”

“Her corpse?”

“No.”

“Give her the phone.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Because Kureto is beside? Or are you being eavesdropped? Thank you for worrying about my sister. You are as gentle as always, Guren. But it’s okay, let her talk to me.”

“……”

Guren removed the phone from his ear and looked up.

“She wants Shinoa to talk to her.”

Kureto hesitated and said.

“Put it on loudspeaker.”

Guren pressed the loudspeaker button. A clear voice sounded from the phone.

“Shinoa, everything alright?”

Shinoa looked at the phone with narrowed eyes and sniggered.

“Which aspect is that ‘Everything alright?” referring to?”

“Mmm~, your unexplained emotions? So, really, how’s everything?”

Thus, Shinoa, who was slightly unhappy, pouted and said.

“Well, it went exactly like how onee-san predicted. Even though everything was alright…… little Shinoa still experienced danger an eight year old was defenseless against.”

“Aye~ Kureto is a closet Lolicon?”

“…..So annoying, you sound like you’re not worried at all. I saw the text. It said: do whatever you want.”

“Ah haha. I did write that. Are you hurt?”

Shinoa shook her head.

“No. I know there’s no other way. I was not interrogated.”

“Indeed. Kureto won’t use inefficient methods that are fruitless. That’s why he’s weal. Well, I’m glad that everything is alright. Am I being put on loudspeaker?”

“Yeah.”

“Who is listening?”

“Guren, Kureto-nii and some blonde girl I don’t recognize.”

“It’s Sanguu Aoi. Father’s not here?”

Kureto spoke.

“Father does not know that you are missing.”

“Ah, Kureto onii-san?”

“……..”

“Long time no see”

Kureto interjected.

“Stop your nonsense now. You have gone missing after betraying the Hiragi House. Many of your comrades have died. What is all these for? Why go missing?”

Mahiru seemed happy to reply.

“Ah Haha, I did not plan to talk to a liar.”

“What are you talking about? I did not lie…..”

“Father doesn’t know I’m missing? Father, who staunchly believes in me?”

“This is the truth.”

“La, lala, lalala……what next? Is father angry? With regards to the betrayal of the next Head of the Hiragi House,”

“I already said father does not know.”

“Liar. Please tell father. That I did not intend to betray. I fell into the trap Kureto-nii set for me due to his jealousy. I was cast out.”

“……..”

Kureto looked a little more serious now.

But Mahiru did not stop.

“Say, Kureto-nii teamed up with the Hyakuya Sect and planned to betray the Hiragi House. Say, I did not betray the Hiragi House.”

But Kureto replied.

“Such foolish words, no one will believe it, Mahiru.”

“Really? But I believe father’s trust in me is way more than that of Kureto-nii’s. Logically speaking, those who are weak will be jealous of those who are strong. That is easy to understand right? Then, me and Kureto-nii, who is stronger? The reality is harsh. I will not be jealous of you. In other words, that’ll be-?”

“Mahiru. Shut up.”

“Oh and. Kureto-nii made a big mistake. When talking about this topic, you should have ended the call immediately. By not ending it off…. you want to track me? Indeed, buying a bit of time so you could locate me. After all, I did not intend to hide.”

Kureto laughed coldly.

“No. I have already found you, Mahiru. The special ops—-”

Mahiru interjected.

“They are all killed.”

“…….”

“Ah, I’m so sorry Kureto onii-san, you must be grieving for the death of your comrades. But are these even comrades? Having teamed up with the Hyakuya Sect, can Hiragi Kureto’s subordinates even be considered <Mikado no Oni>’s comrades?”

Just then, the door opened.

A boy donning the First Shibuya High uniform shouted.

“Kureto-san! The conversation between you and Mahiru-san are currently being broadcasted across the school compound!”

Kureto looked at him with cold eyes.

Guren turned back and saw talismans affixed onto the corner of the door. Talismans to prevent sound from entering. With this talisman, it would be hard for sound waves to travel through the air.

Early on, this room was already bugged to ensure its inhabitants do not hear what’s going on outside.

This was Mahiru’s trap.

It was not known when the talismans were affixed. Perhaps, it was already affixed long before Mahiru went missing.

Everyone was at the mercy of Mahiru. It was not about betrayal anymore.

Being forcefully manipulated in the palm of a monster.

Mahiru continued.

“What a scary thing. Exactly how many spies from the Hyakuya Sect are currently in <Mikado no Oni>?”

“…..End the call, Guren. I lost this time.”

Kureto admitted defeat.

But Mahiru did not stop.

“After that, that tragedy will repeat itself. The tragedy where lots of students will die. Hiragi Kureto, if you, a traitor, continue as the student council president of this school…..”

Kureto snatched the phone from Guren and switched the loudspeaker off before placing it near his ear. But that was useless. Because everything had already been broadcasted throughout the entire school.

Kureto said.

“You are already broken, Mahiru. What you are doing will result in innocent deaths.”

Indeed.

Mahiru planned that all. If internal fights broke out, more people in <Mikado no Oni> would die.

Mahiru replied.

“What are you talking about, traitor?”

“I forbid you doing this. I won’t stand aside and watch you kill innocent followers of <Mikado no Oni> as if you have else better to do. I will protect my comrades.”

“Ah ha, what are you talking about? Isn’t this your doing, Kureto-nii? You plan to violate me. When plans did not proceed your way, the anger and hate made you lose control….”

Just then, Kureto let out a deep breath. With a voice loud enough to cover Mahiru’s voice, he shouted.

“Arrange a meeting! The topic will be on the sentencing of the traitor Mahiru!”

With that, Kureto ended the call.

There was immediate silence.

Kureto looked at Guren.

“…..Do you know all these?”

Guren replied.

“You are referring to?”

“What just happened.”

“You think I’ll know?”

Guren said in a self-deprecating tone.

“I don’t think so. The primary suspects, you and Shinoa probably did not have a chance to feed her information. This all must be her doing. She single-handedly pitted <Mikado no Oni> against the Hyakuya Sect. Very abnormal. A little shaken with fear.”

Guren felt the same way.

Since when and along which line of logic did Mahiru achieve such a thing?

No matter what, the 2 organizations she declared as enemies was this country’s biggest and second biggest sorcery organizations.

She held on to the lever by fuelling the war between the two and caused both of them to start collapsing from internal altercations.

All by herself.

Guren asked.

“The news that you have attacked Mahiru was….

But, Kureto interrupted in a voice filled with irritation.

“You believe her?”

“There must be believers out there.”

“…..Ah, right. There should be.”

Kureto whispered. He did not seem confused or lost. Just that, he seemed to be thinking about something and remained silent for a while.

“…….The Hiragi House will not collapse yet.”

“……”

“But the Hyakuya Sect must have heard what was just said. They must have discovered the weakness and internal conflict in the Hiragi House. Then even the most devoted followers will start doubting. The Hyakuya Sect will exploit this. There will be deaths involved. Many comrades will die.”

He said comrades.

Kureto chose this word.

Was this his true thoughts or was this a show?

Kureto looked at Guren and said.

“Eh, Guren.”

“What?”

“For what reason are you living? Don’t you have selfish desires?”

“……..”

“To topple the Hiragi House? To destroy <Mikado no Oni> which has been abusing you for so long and become the top? But, to achieve this, how many sacrifices can you tolerate?”

“…….”

“You saved Goshi and Mito. You cannot condone Shinoa’s death. For someone like this, can you even share the same dream as Mahiru?”

Kureto asked.

Guren was unable to reply to that.

Would he become like Mahiru?

Would he become a monster?

Shinya once said.

“If you chose the same option as Mahiru, then there will be no need for us to save her.”

But his selfish desire was not to save Mahiru.

So, what should he do?

What did he expect?

“Want to say something?”

Guren asked. Kureto replied.

“I believe you. Because you are a human, not a monster. Thus, Guren, become my comrade.”

“……..”

“This way, many lives will be saved. We’ll work together to solve this problem with as few casualties as possible.”

Kureto extended his hand.

Perhaps, Kureto needed comrades. Trustworthy comrades. Comrades that had not been influenced by the Hyakuya Sect. Comrades not affiliated with Mahiru. Comrades who cannot condone deaths of those around. Comrades who are easily exploited.

In other words, the disintegration began.

Hiragi Kureto had been forced into a dead end. Forced to rely on the Ichinose trash.

“……”

Looking at Kureto’s extended palm and Shinoa’s trance-like eyes.

Guren did not take that hand and said.

“…..Even if I refuse, it is useless right?

Kureto smiled.

“Indeed. Alright. Kill Mahiru.”

He said.

But that would not bring everything to conclusion. Kureto must have known that. The fire of internal wars had been lit up.

And that of war against the Hyakuya Sect.

It was the 21st of August.

There were only 4 more months before the Christmas during which the world would be destroyed arrived.

“You know, this is too hectic, Mahiru.”

Guren muttered so softly no one else could hear.

———————————————————————————————————-

Both Guren and Shinoa were released.

They walked from the interrogation room to the gym. At the entrance of the gym, Shinya, who was leaning against the wall, was waiting.

Shinya looked at them and wanted to say something but stopped when he saw the silhouette of a bloodied Shinoa.

“….Oh my, looks like you were interrogated.”

Shinoa waved her seemingly bloodied hands and giggled.

“No, this is makeup. I look like a corpse don’t I? GAOWW—”

Shinoa childishly waved both of her hands. Shinya shrugged and smiled.

“A corpse won’t go ‘Gaoww—’ right?”

“Oh really?”

“It goes something like GROWLL—”

“I see no difference.”

“Hahaha. That was not bad. Was it to trick me and Guren?”

Shinoa nodded.

“Yeah. Are you tricked?”

“Yeah. Totally tricked! I thought you were a real corpse!”

“GAOWWW—-!”

“I already said it was Growlll—-”

Ignoring such stupid conversation, Guren walked out of the gym.

“Oi—— ignoring us?”

Shinya caught up with him.

Guren asked.

“How is the situation outside?”

The conversation between Mahiru and Kureto was being broadcasted throughout the school.

Shinya replied.

“It was very powerful. However, it is quite silent within the school. It seems like everyone is pondering what the truth is and how to reject the existence of this incident and let this matter be forgotten.”

“Mito and Goshi?”

“Eh? How rare. Worrying for shogi friends you are on good terms with?”

Shinya joyfully replied. Guren looked Shinya in irritation.

Shinya smiled and walked to his side.

Guren asked.

“Kureto said he’ll call you over too. Have you been called?”

Shinya shook his head.

“No. But, that doesn’t mean I won’t be called. After all, I already know that little Shinoa is a corpse in disguise…..now is not the time to talk about this.”

Walking forward, the silhouettes of students in the school compound came into view. No one was smiling. They all seemed to be engaged in some kind of discussion.

The topic must be about how they would proceed from here.

An average student was probably not even aware of the conflict between the Hyakuya Sect and <Mikado no Oni>.

But, a full-blown war would break out soon. No, the war had already started a long time ago. Now, everyone knew.

Coupled with the internal war going on in the Hiragi House.

Guren had not even done anything and the Hiragi house had already started to break. The world was undergoing a revolution.

“From when was the conversation being broadcasted? Was my conversation with Mahiru broadcasted?”

As Guren asked, Shinya looked at him.

“Ah, so Guren spoke too.”

It seemed like only the part about Kureto was broadcasted.

“What did she say to you?”

Guren replied.

“She asked me if I was still alive.”

“Ah haha, that is so like her. It must be her heartfelt words.”

Hearing that, Shinoa interrupted.

“At that time, all of my sister’s words were lies. I don’t think it was heartfelt.”

Guren looked at Shinoa.

She continued.

“Also, her voice was more excited than usual. It was probably because she was very glad to be talking with Guren, the guy she likes most.”

Shinya smiled.

“Wait, wait. If that was the case, then as her fiance, what should I do?”

“Who knows. When faced with romantic relationships between adults, a child like me won’t know anything.”

Shinoa narrowed her eyes and shrugged.

Guren observed her actions, unsure of why she would say something like that. Before, when Shinoa was asked which side she belonged to, her reply was the more interesting side.

She was not interested in the Hiragi House and did not join the Hyakuya Sect. Even though she liked her sister because she was gentle—

“Shinoa.”

“Here.”

“You are abandoned by Mahiru. Your death won’t matter to her.”

“Yeah, indeed.”

She nodded.

“Despite this, are you still her comrade?”

Being asked this, Shinoa rolled her eyes about and stared at the ceiling, puzzled.

“However, I do believe the person most against my death would be my sister. The rest of the people won’t bother even if I were to die one day in an unknown place.”

Guren looked on as Shinoa calmly said that.

“It would bother me a little.”

“Eh? You are a strange person.”

Shinya, who was walking beside, added on.

“Me too, I’ll cry if you die. I’ll be really troubled if you do become a corpse.”

“GAOWW—-?”

“GROWLL—”

Shinoa narrowed her eyes and smiled. There were some areas of that face that closely resembled Mahiru. She lifted her head and met the gaze of Guren and Shinya.

“Aye aye~ How shocking that two people who I seldom see would be grief over my death. This must mean that you two love my sister deeply. I am being cared for as a replacement for my sister.”

She seemed to have very low self-worth. But it was understandable since her sister was so outstanding.

Shinoa said.

“What a pity, though, that my sister did not see anyone as her equal, not even me or Guren-san or Shinya onii-san. It was clear, today, that I am being officially abandoned. She will probably not make any contact anymore. My sister has accomplished what she intended to do at this school.”

Indeed.

The flame that was lit up here would lick across the whole of <Mikado no Oni>.

According to circumstances, the war between the Hyakuya Sect and <Mikado no Oni> would occur very quickly.

At the same time, the surveillance on Guren and Shinya would probably be more relaxed too. Mahiru's actions today would cause things to progress down this road. Both Shinya and Guren had secrets hidden from the Hiragi House. But these secrets didn't matter anymore; Mahiru' actions resulted in ramifications so widespread that these secrets could be ignored.

Most importantly, if the war between the Hyakuya Sect and <Mikado no Oni> was revealed to the students, things would worsen instantaneously.

Both organizations were hiding secrets from their followers. They would eventually be unable to continue the disguise and all their plans would be exposed.

Therefore, if the case of Mahiru betraying the Hyakuya Sect was true, the Hyakuya Sect would definitely panic too.

Or, could it be that all these were the fruit of the cooperation between Mahiru and the Hyakuya Sect?

"……"

But amidst all these, there was no place for me to interfere.

The protagonist is Mahiru.

Hiragi House.

The Hyakuya Sect.

There was no place for the Ichinose House. They didn't even matter. Exactly like what Kureto and Shinoa said.

His presence was not even threatening.

What exactly was the reason for this gulf of difference?

He remembered Mahiru's words.

"But, the present you can't accomplish this right? How sad, I am the stronger one. After all, I am the hare. The hare bravely charging towards destruction. That's why I am waiting for tortoise oji-san. Before my destruction, attempt to save me, Guren."

She had accepted destruction. Accepted her moral decay and everything. But sacrificed

everything worth protecting.

Is this the right move or the wrong move?

"……."

For some reason, Guren's right arm felt a little unwell. A wave of sharp pain travelled through. The arm that was amputated but reattached with the power of the <Oni> was starting to hurt. Guren touched it with his left hand.

Shinya spoke.

"……So, what do we do, Guren?"

No matter how, there was nothing they could do now.

The only thing they could do was to stand aside and watch how quickly Mahiru's plans would progress.

War would begin soon.

A large scale war would begin soon.

By then, where would the Ichinose House be standing? Standing at which spot would allow the Ichinose House to bypass the danger and pick up a few advantages along the way?

No, the main point is, do I have such a realization?

The realization to topple the Hiragi House—-

To topple the Hiragi House without yielding to the Hyakuya Sect. To topple the Hiragi House only to end up being protected by the Hyakuya Sec would make no difference to the current situation.

Then, what should I do? Which is the best way out?

There's no time left. There's no time left. There's no time left to agonise over this.

Start thinking.

Think hard.

What do I really want?

What exactly do I want?

If I do nothing, as it is now, the war will end right?

One possible conclusion is victory.

Or, the other possible conclusion is destruction.

Either way, there would be innumerable victims. It was all due to the selfish desires of a certain person, resulting in so many innocent deaths. Despite so, if I were to act out on my selfish desires, I will surely walk into a hate war. A path forcefully treaded on countless dead bodies.

When things finally settle down, all that would be left is a mountain piled up with corpses. Then why will there be a need to play the hare and the tortoise? It doesn't matter if things progress quickly or slowly. The end is already decided.

If that was the case, there's no time to choose my plans.

Guren halted his footsteps.

"Why?"

Shinya asked. Guren ignored him.

Waves of pain shot through his arm. The injury suffered from the invasion of the demon started to hurt again. There were no scars. Lacerated skin around the point of amputation was completely healed. Then why was the area where his arm was reattached burning up with pain?

"Guren?"

"….yeah?"

"Everything all right?"

Guren shook his head.

"Everything's fine."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

Just then, the bell signalling the end of the afternoon break sounded. Shinya and Guren looked towards the source of the sound.

"Ah, the fifth lesson is starting soon."

Shinya said. Just then, Shinoa extended her tiny palm towards Guren.

Guren looked at her outstretched hand and asked.

“What?”

“I need some money.”

“Ah?”

“I’m going back. Adults with faces filled with complexity are going to start a boring war right? However, I’m not interested.”

“…….”

“But despite so, I was attacked when I was at home and was kidnapped here. It’s not just my wallet that I left behind, I didn’t even get to put on my shoes. So I want to take a taxi back home.”

“Oh. Then why ask me for money?”

“This is only natural, caring for your childhood partner’s cute little sister…..”

“Not interested.”

“Eh—-”

Shinoa laughed.

Shinya, who was standing beside, laughed as well before taking out a 10 000 yen note from his wallet.

“I’ll help you call a taxi. Therefore, help me pass a message to Mahiru saying: do you remember who your fiance is?”

Shinoa looked up at Shinya and said.

“Do you like my sister?”

“Hm—- How do I describe this…”

“Then why do you want me to pass such a message to my sister?”

“Because I don’t want to lose to Guren.”

“So, this is all about winning and losing?”

Hearing that, Shinya repeated,

“Hm—- How do I describe this…”

and laughed.

Shinoa, wearing an expression of disbelief, tilted her head and said.

“Which side are you on?”

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know. I’m not interested anyway.”

“Indeed—. Well, let’s go call a taxi.”

Afterwards, Shinya started to fiddle with his phone.

Shinoa waved her hands, which were painted scarlet with blood, and said.

“Can corpses take taxis?”

“Since Shinoa-chan is so adorable, this shouldn’t be a problem.”

“Well~Indeed, I am fully aware that I am naturally beautiful girl who resembles her sister~”

Ignoring their conversation, Guren started pondering over the incident just now.

His mind was filled with matters regarding boring wars.

And especially, his lack of power.

He lacked the power to catch up with Mahiru.

If that was the case, what would he do? What should he do to continue pushing forward? She was a prodigy. A hare willing to sell her soul to a demon in exchange for power to continue running.

What should he do to catch her and run ahead?

Guren mulled over this matter.

Just then, his phone started to ring.

Guren took his phone out from his pocket. The same number from just now was showing on the screen.

It was Mahiru.

Hiragi Mahiru was calling.

“……”

Guren was unsure if he should pick it up. Kureto might eavesdrop the moment he answered the call and brand him as a traitor to be killed. I'm too weak, I'm being frequently pushed around, forced to choose between life and death.

"…..So annoying, I've had enough."

Guren distanced himself from Shinoa and Shinya and answered the call.

"So?"

"……."

Mahiru did not answer. He had no idea if the caller was indeed Mahiru or someone else.

"Why are you calling me? This phone…."

Mahiru's voice sounded from the other side.

"No one is eavesdropping on us."

"Can't be sure about that."

"No worries."

"So what?"

"Well, I want to hear…..Guren's voice."

She spoke softly. A voice completely different from that used to threaten Kureto.

Guren smiled.

"Just moments ago, you were having fun fooling around with me by asking me if I was still alive."

Mahiru was silent for a while. Only her light breaths could be heard.

"…..That, wasn't me."

"Then who was it?"

"Oni."

"……."

"An Oni that controlled me."

“<Kiju> right?”

“…..Yeah.”

“You were exploited by the Oni?”

“….Yeah.”

Mahiru spoke candidly. It sounded very different from the tone she used to converse with Kureto; her voice was a little immature with a hint of moe. This was the voice of Mahiru that Guren recognized.

She used such a voice to tell him that she was being controlled by the Oni.

Oni.

The curse of the Oni.

Guren narrowed his eyes and touched his right arm with which he was holding the phone. The curse of the Oni had been mixed into his body too. There was poison in his blood; by injecting that blood, Mitsuki’s hand turned into a monster.

That monster took over and controlled Mahiru’s body.

However,

“……Do you have evidence proving that the person speaking to me now is not an Oni?”

“No.”

“If that is the case, I’ll end the call……”

“Wait! Wait up! Don’t end the call yet Guren. If you end the call now, there is a possibility that I’ll never be able to talk to you again.

Mahiru spoke in a voice full of panic.

Guren was unsure if this was a trap or this was the truth. Therefore, he might consider hanging up now. Kureto made a mistake here. Mahiru was smart. Exceptionally smart. It was possible for one to be controlled merely by talking with her.

I should not continue this conversation.

Guren’s thumb twitched.

However.

“…….”

He could not hang up.

He should have ended the call, but he could not bring himself to do it.

“What exactly do you want to talk about?”

Guren asked.

Mahiru calmed down and replied.

“…..I would like you to do me a favour.”

“Ha? Do you want to exploit me too?”

“No. It’s not that. No……er….ah, no…….the time is”

Mahiru sounded like she was in pain, panting heavily.

Guren had seen a similar case before. There had been a few times when Mahiru exhibited symptoms and behavior of having double personalities trapped in a single body.

The Mahiru at that time told Guren to run. She told him not to come into contact with the Oni. She told him her existence was no more. If all those were not for show,

“…… You, are you the real Mahiru?”

Guren asked. Mahiru replied painfully.

“……Yeah. I called you……when the Oni in me is sleeping.”

Guren was unsure if this was a mere show put up by Mahiru. But, was there even a need to put up a show? Mahiru was able to single-handedly trick the Hyakuya Sect and <Mikado no Oni> into playing along with her plans. So why would she need Guren’s power now?

“What do you want me to do?”

“Please….”

Mahiru said in an agonizing voice.

“Please kill me…..”

“…….”

“Within a day, there’s not much time during which I regained my consciousness…..Therefore,

please do so when I'm still able to resist……when I'–"

Guren interrupted.

"Stop joking. Tell me where you are, I'll help you control the Oni in your body."

"……No. No need to entertain such thoughts. If you see me, kill me immediately."

"Enough. Your address…."

"GUREN! Please! Now is the only time. I'm going to disappear soon. If you don't do it, there'll be no one else who could kill me."

"Very confident. No one else who could kill you? Are you playing god?"

"Please, there's not much time….!"

"I refuse. Tell me where you are. I'll save you."

""Guren. It's, too late….."

"Cut that out. Tell me your address….."

"GUREN!!"

Mahiru yelled.

Mahiru yelled in a tearful voice.

No, on the other side of the phone, she was probably crying. Guren heard her trying to suppress her tears.

She said.

"It's already, too late."

"……"

"You want to save me no matter what, I'm truly delighted…..but I can't go back anymore. I am no longer human. That's why…."

"That's why you want me to kill you."

"Because apart from you, there's no one else I can rely on to do this."

"…. You want me to, kill you?"

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.”

“How exactly……”

Why did things have to end up this way? Guren wanted to ask her. Why was it that for such an intelligent person, she would chose such an idiotic option?

Why give up on being a human? Why walk down a road with no path leading back?

Why, you,

“….. Didn’t wait for me….?”

Guren said. But that was insanely stupid and irresponsible for him to say that. Even if she waited, chances were, things won’t change. For the present Guren, he had yet managed to gain enough power to change the rules and laws enacted by the Hiragi House. Neither did he have enough power to save her.

Thus, all his words now were nonsense. It was merely a false show of strength by a man with no true power.

Mahiru’s sobs could be heard from the other side of the phone.

With her voice trembling, she said.

“ *crying*…..Guren.”

“…….”

“I love you most, Guren.”

“……”

“Therefore, please let me die with this lingering affection for you…..”

Guren interjected.

“…..I cannot allow this. I’ll save you.”

“Please.”

“No.”

“Kill me.”

“Shut up. Tell me your location. Leave the rest for later.”

Following that, Mahiru told him her location and discussed a rendezvous with Guren. Because there were only specific times when she could regain her consciousness. However, these intermittent periods of soberness was getting shorter and shorter. Thus, the pressing need for time.

They would be meeting today.

If they waited til tomorrow, Mahiru's consciousness could have already evaporated completely.

That was why Guren had to see Mahiru today.

Of course, this could be a trap.

Perhaps she had been putting on a show.

He was under no obligation to go either.

His rational thoughts and judgement was practically screaming at him to not follow her instructions.

However, despite all these,

"……"

Guren Ichinose, a weak, naive and human (not demon) guy, still decided to go ahead and meet up with Mahiru Hiragi.

The place Mahiru chose was fifteen minutes away from ikejiri-Ohashi station, which was located on the Tokyu Den-en-toshi line and was a stop away from Shibuya. It was a five-storey white-colored condominium. There were five doors per storey.

The room Mahiru rented was on the highest storey. Her unit number was 501, the room at the corner. Guren walked past the narrow entrance and boarded the lift which capacity was probably a maximum of 4 people. If he was attacked here, he won't be able to launch a large scale attack with his sword. He looked at his demonic sword carried in a bag which was slung across his back.

He was probably not being followed. Even if he was, he would have lost them after changing trains a few times along the way. Most importantly, it was easy to spot any stalkers as there were many wide and empty roads. This was probably why Mahiru chose this place.

It was also because she really did live here.

As the lift arrived, Guren walked towards room number 501. The corridor was very narrow as well. It was built in such a way that even if there were more than two enemies attacking, the

chances of being attacked easily was low.

The time was 5.30pm.

It was still bright outside.

The surroundings was a little warm.

Was Mahiru really living in this condominium?

Guren stood before room 501.

"……"

Even though Guren checked for movements inside the room, he could not be sure if she was indeed present.

Should he ring the doorbell or open the door directly?

Guren chose the latter and gently opened the door. It was unlocked. He felt a slight breeze. The windows were probably open.

A pair of feminine shoes was placed near the front door. The corridor was dimly lit. The toilet and bathroom was located near the corridor The rooms were probably on the other side.

Guren walked in without removing his shoes.

There was indeed no one inside.

Walking past the corridor, Guren entered a room occupying about 10-30 square metres. It was a simple room with a bed and a table.

The sailor uniform First Shibuya High students wear was hung on the wall.

Guren saw a toy hare and a toy tortoise.

The hare which ran fast and the tortoise which was slow and stupid—

"…..Ha, am I being branded an idiot?"

Guren muttered in slight irritation.

But, the atmosphere around seemed to suggest that someone lived here. Mahiru's scent was present. The light scent of perfume. Guren did not find this scent annoying.

However, there was no one.

The windows were open and the curtains were fluttering to the direction of the wind. Light spilled into the room.

The clock on the table read 5.33pm.

The time discussed with Mahiru was 5.30pm.

In other words, Mahiru was 3 minutes late.

"……"

Guren stood near the table without a sound.

A photo and a thick jotter book was placed on the table.

The photo showed a five or six year old girl happily clinging on to the arm of a boy who looked to be around the same age. The boy was a little shy and was looking away from the camera.

It was the childhood picture of Mahiru and Guren. She even kept something like that. Guren thought.

"……"

Guren flipped open the jotter book beside.

Handwritten words adorned the paged. Was this written by Mahiru? Or others? Guren could not tell. But what was written had something to do with <Kiju> experiments.

It was mainly on human experimentation.

And data about the the death of the experimental subject.

The owner of this journal would always write down a short paragraph of his/her own opinions. Why the experiment failed, how well the experimental subject could tolerate the Oni compared to those before, if there was a chance of success and the steps to take to make this experiment more feasible.

"……"

A huge portion of the journal was dedicated for this.

— To become like this, I probably won't be able to meet Guren anymore…..

Mahiru was a test subject herself.

No, both Mahiru and Shinoa are test subjects.

Mahiru and Shinoa were children born from this experiment: artificial insemination of the sperm belonging to the Head of the Hiragi House into the body of a female Oni test subject.

In other words, the moment Mahiru and Shinoa were born into this world, they were already experimental subjects.

This experiment took a long time and required more than the budget. The only normal, human babies born were Mahiru and Shinoa.

But the two of them were still normal human beings.

Though outstanding, they were still normal human beings.

Because of that, the experiment was halted. Weaponizing the <Kiju> was rendered impossible. Using more budget to continue the experiments was meaningless.

But the experiment did not end there.

The researchers gave up, but the experiment did not terminate.

One day, Mahiru started to dream. She had a dark dream. An endlessly dark dream. In that pitch darkness, she was constantly interrogated by an Oni.

The same dream was shared by young Shinoa. Mahiru warned her sister not to tell anyone about that. Young Shinoa even went through harsh trainings to tackle interrogations.

If the conversations with the Oni was known by father– was being known by the Hiragi House, experimentation would begin again.
From then on, we would not be able to live as normal humans.
"……"
Despite this, no matter how well I kept it hidden, the voice of the Oni grew louder day by day.
That voice was repeating the same thing.
Go kill someone.
Let your desires run amok.
Destroy everything.
It was as if every time I aged and the desire to submit to my vanity, lust and cravings for recognition increased, the voice of the Oni became louder.
The reason why I looked like normal humans was because I had yet started to act on my desires.
But the present is different.
It is already way too different.
Desires had sprung up in my heart.
I want to be together with Guren.
I want to be together with the person I love.
I want to be hugged by the person I love.
If that was the case, destroy everything.
The Oni said.
The Oni commanded.

If this continues, I'll become abnormal one day. I might even lose my humanity.
To live on, I have to subdue this power.
The increase in intensity of these desires seemed to be linked with the growth of secondary sex characteristics. The moment puberty hit, contact initiated by the Oni increased exponentially. There were cases when I lost consciousness. There were cases when I lost myself due to these desires. Such cases started to increase gradually.
There was urgent need to suppress this power.
Before Shinoa imouto-chan experiences her first period, this experiment must be completed.
"……."

That was why Mahiru restarted the human experimentations.

To complete the <Kiju> experiments.

And her partner was the Hyakuya Sect.

Selling information on the Hiragi House to the Hyakuya Sect in exchange for knowledge and funds for the experiment.

I cannot partner up with the Hiragi House. Because once I do that, they would know about the Oni present in my sister's body. Once revealed, they would surely conduct human experimentation on Shinoa.

Therefore, Mahiru became the experimental subject and charged into battle on her own.

"……."

That was the first part of that thick journal. Some of the words sounded a little childish. Guren looked up at the clock on the wall.

It was past 7pm.

The room was already dark. The sun had set and he could no longer see the words as clearly as before.

"…..What a pain. How late does she want to be?"

Guren sighed.

He stood still in the darkness.

Mahiru was conducting the <Kiju> experiments not for her own desires. She did not hope for this experiment to continue. But she had no choice. Everything was documented in her journal.

"……."

Guren heard a faint sound. It came from behind the fluttering curtains. Outside the windows.

The silhouette of a woman.

“…Mahiru?”

Guren asked.

“…..Yes.”

The silhouette replied.

“Were you there all the time?”

“No, I just arrived.”

“…….You are extremely late.”

“……”

Mahiru did not reply.

Guren observed Mahiru carefully before unzipping the bag with his demonic sword. Needless to say, Mahiru noticed.

Guren asked.

“……Could it be that, you didn’t know today was our rendezvous?”

If she did not know, then that person standing behind the curtains was not Mahiru.

It was an Oni.

An Oni that took over Mahiru’s body.

Guren held the base of the demonic sword.

He was prepared to attack any moment.

Mahiru laughed.

“Ah haha…….If I said I didn’t know, what are you going to do?”

“…….”

“Kill me?”

“Guren replied.

“…..You told me to kill you.”

“So you are going to kill me? Do you have enough in you do it?”

It was the Oni.

The Oni was standing there.

“Mahiru has, disappeared?”

Guren asked. She laughed again.

“Nope. I am Mahiru.”

“You are not Mahiru.”

“I am Mahiru. Look, my hair, chest, body, everything…..”

“You are not Mahiru.”

She laughed.

She laughed happily.

“Ah Haha, hahaha, hahahahahaha. So annoying. If not, then what am I? What exactly am I?”

“……”

“I have been waiting for you. I have been waiting for you to save me. I want to hug you. I want to hug you tightly.”

“…….”

“That’s why I preserved my virginity. I want to dedicate my first time to you. Come, Guren.”

“Shut up.”

“Guren, don’t be shy…..”

“Shut up!”

Guren yelled and pushed the curtains aside.

Mahiru, donning a sailor uniform, was standing at the balcony.

She was not smiling.

Completely not smiling.

Tears were pooling in her eyes.

The moment she saw Guren, Mahiru’s face contorted in pain, as if her emotions were threatening to flood over. Tears began streaming down her face. She backed away as if stricken with fear.

Before he knew it, Mahiru was preparing to escape.

Guren grabbed her wrist. If she intended to kill herself, everything would end, be it the enemies or the Oni. He would be killed too.

But Guren did not care about any of these. He held on to her wrist tightly and pulled her towards him, into his embrace.

She was trembling.

“…….You are too late, Guren. The latecomer…..the latecomer is not me.”

She said.

Guren replied.

“…..Ah, yeah. Sorry.”

There were no more words after that.

Mahiru struggled furiously, intending to break free from his embrace.

“…..Let go.”

“Mahiru, calm down.”

“…..Everything is, too late.”

“Mahiru.”

“….I am no longer, a human, Guren. I am not worthy of your embrace. I don’t have that right anymore. I cannot be with you any longer…..”

Guren interrupted.

“I’m with you now! Right now, we’re together!”

Guren held her in a tight embrace, trying to calm her down.

Mahiru’s body was trembling a lot.

Guren was unable to bury that abysmal darkness that resided in her heart.

The only thing he could do now was to hold her tightly, like how it was now.

“……”

Mahiru’s body started to loosen up. She held onto Guren as if she was engaged in a prayer. Mahiru stuffed her face into Guren’s chest. Muffling sounds, as she tried to suppress her tears, could be heard.

Guren could not do anything about that. As of now, he had no power to grant her immediate assistance. So he could only hold her quietly. Mahiru’s body was soft, just like that of a woman’s.

Moonlight streaming in from the cracks in the curtains illuminated the picture on the table.

The picture showed the two of them as children. The Mahiru in the picture was kind and happily smiling. Guren was unable to look at her straight due to his shyness.

But since then, was Mahiru bearing the weight of this abysmal darkness? Continually escaping from the voice of the Oni?

Guren suddenly remembered her words.

Mahiru used to say.

“I……don’t want to part with Guren.”

In spite of this, the two of them separated.

A decade passed since then.

Now, the present Mahiru could no longer smile as kindly and innocently. She could only cry, or smile as if she had lost everything.

What should I do? Guren pondered.

He gently stroked Mahiru’s head and said.

“…..Anyway, don’t leave me anymore. I’m not late, I’m here to save you. So….”

“Impossible.”

Mahiru answered obstinately.

Guren shook his head.

“Why impossible?”

“Impossible.”

“Possible.”

“I already said it is impossible!”

Mahiru shouted, tears streaming down her face, her voice shaking.

Despite seeing Mahiru like this, Guren spoke again.

“It’s possible.”

At the same time, he was agonizing over his weakness. Why was it that he could only say such irresponsible things?

Words with no confidence and no objective.

However, at least,

"…….You are not alone."

Mahiru held on to Guren with even more force. Her trembling body started to calm down.

Mahiru looked up, tears continued to pour from her eyes. In spite of this, she was stunningly beautiful.

"…..Guren."

She said softly.

"Do you still love me?"

Guren did not have the answer to that question. From the very beginning, they were already worlds apart.

When he was six, there was no doubt that he did like her. In fact, he could go as far as to say that she was his everything. To get her back, he wanted power– he used to think this way.

But, that was a very long time ago.

10 years.

10 years and they had not met even once.

There were now subordinates serving under him; he was now responsible for the lives of his comrades following <Mikado no Tsuki> which was operating under the Ichinose House. One wrong judgement and his life could be the price.

He did not have it in him to act hastily and irresponsibly.

Yet, all of his duties and responsibilities were cast aside for the day.

He was embracing someone who should not be embraced in a place he should not be in.

Therefore, there was a chance of him being killed here.

Once he died, everything would terminate.

He could not protect anyone anymore.

He could not save anyone anymore.

Be it puerile desires or ambitions accumulated over the years, all of those would go to waste.

Mahiru looked a little scared as she smiled.

“…….You don’t love me anymore? Well, indeed, it’s been ten years after all.”

“……..”

“To be in love…..with an…..an inhumane and hideous monster…..”

Guren cut her off and said impatiently.

“Ah, irritating, so noisy. You should have gotten a feel of the situation now. I should not be here, should not have contacted you. What am I doing….”

He’s had enough.

Enough of his weakness. Enough of betraying those comrades following him and believing in him.

But did he really have no idea of the current plans? Did he really have no plans at all? If he could convince Mahiru to join the side of his comrades, it would be advantageous to him too. If he had such thoughts, then he could forgive himself again.

“….. So annoying, I’m the epitome of an idiot.”

Guren muttered in despair.

Mahiru’s expressions started to distort. It was because she was happy. Tears started brimming from her eyes again.

“Guren, I love you the most.”

Mahiru buried her face deep into Guren’s chest.

She was no longer trembling.

Like just now, am I able to bury the darkness weighing her down even if it is just a little bit?

Endless darkness. Lustrous moonlight. Fluttering curtains.

What should I do in order to pull her back from the darkness?

Mahiru maintained her position and said.

“….Then, then, could you hug me?

“……..”

“Could you hug me even though I am such a hideous monster?”

“…….”

She called herself a monster.

A hideous monster.

Guren knew that she must suffered severe emotional injuries. It’s only natural. Because she was the same age as him. She was only a sixteen year old girl.

She only had herself.

It had been this way all along.

Guren asked.

“…..If I hugged you, will the darkness enveloping you dissipate?”

“…..I don’t know.”

She said.

“I don’t know anything anymore. Guren. I…..I, am tired……”

Just then, before she could finish, Guren gently touched her face. Lifting her chin up, he covered her lips with his.

He did not know if this was the right choice. Her lips felt soft. Not like that of a monster. Not like that of a hideous monster.

Mahiru’s eyes widened, pupils dilating. Following that, she slowly closed her eyes.

Guren could feel, deep in his heart, his desire for her.

It was said that Oni liked the desires of humans.

Desire.

Hideous desires.

The two of them maintained this position for a while.

The night breeze fluttered the curtains and blew into the house. They lost track of how long the kiss was.

Mahiru stepped back.

“Ah, Ah haha.”

She giggled, mildly embarrassed.

She held her hands near her chest and said.

“…….because Guren suddenly kissed…. my heart is beating so fast it feels like exploding.”

Guren asked.

“Are you calmer now?”

She looked at him with a slightly forlorn expression.

“…..That, that was to shut me up…”

“No.”

Guren interrupted.

Mahiru giggled shyly. A blush appeared on her cheeks.

“Really……so it was not because of that.”

“Yeah.”

“If so.”

She asked, the blush spreading throughout her face.

“That….like that….even though I am like that, would you still want me?”

Definitely yes. There was no need to doubt that. He had that kind of desire in his heart.

A narrow room. Her scent. Lustrous moonlight.

Curtains. Breeze. The picture on the table.

A summer night. Memories.

Promises. Dreams.

Selfish desires. Despair.

Hope. World.

Christmas.

Destruction.

Comrades.

The Hiiragi House.

The Hyakuya Sect.

The Ichinose House.

If he intended to ponder over this carefully, rational thoughts would surely form in his mind.

However, Mahiru looked like she was going to cry.

“Hey, Guren. I……”

Guren did not let her continue.

He grabbed her arm again and pulled her close. She seemed to have waited for this moment for a long time as she gave Guren a tight hug. Tears started streaming down her face again.

Was this a tragic romance story?

Or was it a pitiful one?

Guren did not have the answer to that. He did not even know whether there was value in knowing the answer.

That day, they did it.

“……..”

When everything was over, Mahiru got up from the bed.

Darkness resided in the house.

She smoothed out her sailor uniform. Without saying anything, she decided to leave.

She decided to leave just like this.

When she hugged Guren, she looked very happy and sorrowful at the same time.

It was to let her momentarily forget that permanent darkness. Guren could still remember the touch of her soft skin. It was the same as when they were children. The Mahiru from that time always had a dazzling smile on her. He used to believe that as long as they were together, any dream, no matter how impossible, could come true.

[I love Guren the most! How about you? Guren?]

[…….]

[Hey. Hey. Hey.]

[…….]

[Hey Guren, say that you love me too!]

[Don't want to.]

[Why not? I love you so much!]

When she was a child, Mahiru was a spoilt little girl who used to say that a lot. But he, being a shy kid, was unable to answer to her feelings.

Now it was too late. So late that one had already lost all hope.

"……Going out?"

Guren asked. Mahiru nodded.

"……Yeah."

"I can't save you?"

"Nah. You saved me just now."

"Don't go, Mahiru. I……"

"You can't protect me anymore. You don't have enough to protect me. I'm sure we all know that."

"……."

"Who Guren wants to protect is not me. It's your comrades.""

"……."

"If you could show me now, maybe I could still be together with you. If you really do love me and want to be together with me…….then kill all your comrades."

She looked back with tears in her eyes.

"……You can't do it right."

"……"

"Guren is indeed a very gentle person. So gentle that you hugged me to console the pitiful me. Totally different from the selfish me."

Guren looked up at Mahiru. Under the moonlight, her face was heavenly.

"Is protecting one's comrades a very stupid move?"

She shook her head.

"No. I think that is very dashing. Guren is very dashing. But that can't make you strong."

"Aren't you protecting your little sister too?"

"Yeah. That's right. That was why I engulfed Shinoa's Oni. To save Shinoa, I swallowed the Oni in her body. That's why I have started to decay. To house two Onis in one body, that's why I am breaking. But."

She looked at Guren and said.

"…..Despite the fact that I am breaking, I might not forget all that happened today. Guren, I love you most. And, thank you. You made my dream come true. Now….."

She opened both of her palms.

"……Now….instantaneously, the weak aspect of my heart has died. That small and weak six year old Mahiru, the one who called you and loved you so unflinchingly, had seen enough of this world and died."

Guren looked at Mahiru and said.

"…….You used me to achieve this?"

"Yeah."

"To erase your weakness? It that was the case, Mahiru has vanished? You became an Oni?"

"Yeah."

"Stop joking. To say that with tears in your eyes, do you think I'll believe you?"

Mahiru looked up.

With a forlorn expression.

She looked human. She looked like a weak young girl. But, she said desolately,

"……. Data on the <Kiju> is all here. If you intend to save me, then kill them all and meet me."

"Mahiru. What exactly are you battling with?"

"……."

"You ate the Oni in Shinoa's body. In other words, Shinoa is not in danger anymore? If that was the case, what other problems do you have? The Oni in your body? My labs…."

Mahiru interrupted.

"……Your wildest desires, are just these?"

"……."

"To have me with you, will that be the only thing that will make you happy? For someone with so many things to protect, are you able to give them all up and run away with me?"

"……."

"See, you can't do it."

She smiled in a bittersweet way.

Guren observed her face and said.

"Then what are your selfish desires? What are your dreams? Why do this? To topple the Hiragi House?"

But Mahiru remained silent. She got down from the bed. Her lithe body hopped towards the window. Guren could neither catch up with her nor stop her. The current Guren could not walk alongside her.

Mahiru said.

"….However, I'm sorry Guren. To have you involved."

"Why?"

"In order to fully cleanse Shinoa's body of the Oni, I had you share some of the Oni. So, you will become an Oni too. I must be acting like a spoilt kid…."

“If that was the case, stay. Fight alongside me.”

Mahiru shook her head.

“Not enough time left.”

What kind of time was that.

The time left for her as a human?

Or the time left till the apocalypse?

“What exactly will happen during Christmas?”

Mahiru gave a simple answer.

“Like I said before, like how the words described it, destruction– the initial destruction will befall the greedy, ugly adults. More accurately put, in the whole world, those above age 13 will all perish.”

“…..Ah?”

“The god are fuming. Fuming at such greed. Fuming at these filthy experiments. Humans who freely allow their deepest, darkest desires to run amok are unimaginably hideous.

That’s why the Earth had started to rot.

Monsters roam.

Poison rained from the sky.

The Seraph of the End will blow the trumpet. The world will destruct.

The humans will not live. Weak humans are unable to live in such a world.”

Hearing Mahiru’s words, Guren recalled.

Christmas. Destruction. Virus.

“….. Is this terrorism? Will the Hyakuya Sect release some kind of virus?”

Mahiru laughed sadly and bewitchingly.

Just then, the curtains behind her started to flutter again. It was not due to the breeze. A black shadow appeared. The curtains were torn apart.

The lady, who Guren saw yesterday at the park, rushed in.

A beautiful woman.

Opening her mouth.

Fangs appeared.

It's a vampire.

For humans, they were undefeatable enemies.

"……we finally meet, Hiragi Mahiru."

The vampire said.

"Mahiru!"

Guren yelled.

But Mahiru kept her smile.

"……Come here, Asuramaru."

Mahiru said a name Guren did not recognize. Afterwards, as if responding to her call, a black blade suddenly materialized out of thin air and into her right hand.

She swung that sword. That blade could be a <Kiju> weapon as her swings could not be seen. It was definitely swifter than the vampire.

"Ah….."

The vampire was cut into half, a shocked expression plastered across her face. But everything ended there; her upper and lower body disappeared.

Guren was rooted at his spot. He could only yell her name.

Mahiru held the <Kiju> blade and looked back, a forlorn expression on her face.

“So, Guren. Being chased by a vampire yesterday, were you scared?”

“…..So, that was you.”

“I fabricated the news that the Hiragi House is planning to eliminate the Hyakuya Sect. So the Hyakuya Sect started their revenge. This will trigger the Hiragi House to take revenge on them. After that, the Hyakuya Sect will…..”

Sounds of explosion interrupted.

Dong, dongdong, dongdongdong. It sounded like something from a war movie.

Moments later, the sirens of police cars and ambulances could be heard.

It came from where Shibuya was.

Mahiru continued to smile.

“Ah, it was started. Just yesterday, only I was the hare…..but from today onwards, things will be different. Everyone is forced to be a hare. Everyone in the world is a hare. Faster, faster.”

Guren looked at Mahiru before looking out the window.

Sounds of explosions was not stopping.

These sounds could be heard 3000 meters away from Shibuya.

“Ah ha, you are worrying for your comrades? Could Shigure-chan and Sayuri-chan, who love you so much, have already died?”

Guren glared at Mahiru.

“Don’t glare at me. You love me right? After all, we did that.”

“…..Your aim, what is it?”

“The same as you.”

“Stop joking.”

“I’m not joking.”

“Stop joking!”

Mahiru laughed again.

“To continue living with you, To continue living with you in this world. Even if this world is no longer inhabitable. For this, I chose to become an Oni.”

“……I am not the same as you.”

“Aye-, you just said earlier that you want me to stay by your side.”

“You come to my side. I don’t allow you to give up your humanity.”

Mahiru’s face dropped.

Sounds of explosion rang out again. Something exploded behind Mahiru. Wailing and crying could be heard. As well as “Kill them Hyakuya bastards!” A battle was going on outside.

Mahiru backed towards the window and said.

“Ah haha, do you still wish to remain on the side of the humans? Ugly humans who kill each other even if there was only a little bit of paranoia?”

“Mahiru.”

She did not wait and continued to walk back.

“Hey Guren. I know. You, are strong. Very strong. That’s why I love you. Kureto and all these people can’t even come close. If you become serious, you can destroy even the world. That’s why a human’s strength is naive, weak and born from hideousness. That is an Oni’s favourite food.”

“Wait, Mahiru!”

But she did not stop. With her back facing Guren, she intended to leap out of the window. Before she jumped, Mahiru looked back one last time as if she had forgotten something.

“Ah, right Guren. The present us. How old are we?”

She disappeared.

All that was left was her scent and the pitch darkness in the house.

How old are we? She asked me.

He had turned 16 in August.

The virus could kill everyone above the age of 13. As such, her words were weird.

A world humans could no longer live in.

A world weak humans could no longer live in.

His phone which was lying on the bed started to ring. Guren picked up his phone. It was Sayuri.

“Is everything alright, Sayu……”

She screamed.

“GUREN-SAMA! Escape now….the Hyakuya Sect…..”

The call was interrupted. Guren called back immediately. But there was no one picking up.

He called Shigure.

No one picked up.

"……Damn it."

He buttoned his shirt up and picked up his sword which was lying on the ground.

Sounds of explosion continued.

His phone started to ring at the same time. Guren immediately picked up his phone.

"Sayuri?"

But it was not Sayuri, it was Mito. She was crying.

"Gu, Guren…..you are still alive! Where, where are you?"

"Where are you guys?"

"The audio-visual classroom in school. I'm trapped here with a few students."

"I'm coming now."

"Don't come! You'll be killed."

"Then why call me? You want help right? Tell me in detail….."

She interrupte.

"No, it's not like that. It's not……this call….is to thank you…"

Guren grabbed the journal on the table and flew out the front door.

Mito continued.

"Actually…..going to a friend's house yesterday. A male friend's house. It was my first time…."

The lift went down a storey and stopped. There was not enough time to wait. The lift continued to descend.

"All the time, because I was the ojou-san of the Jujo House, everyone was nervous around me. They don't tell me their true thoughts….."

The lift landed on the first storey. Guren immediately rushed out. Even though sounds of explosion rang out in the neighbourhood, there were no signs of battle in the immediate area.

"But you are totally different from them. You'll tell me directly that I am noisy or annoying….I used to consider you as an extremely impolite person. But at the same time…."

Mito's voice trembled a little. She was probably sobbing.

"I was very happy. I was treated as a normal girl for the first time. And not the ojou-san of the Jujo House. I could also….smile like a normal girl…..so"

"So what? You stop talking and listen to me. Tell me the current situation. Who are you with now. What's the state….."

"Guren. Please listen to me."

"No, listen to me first….."

But she ignored him and continued.

"Perhaps I'll…..die today. But, that……because I lived life in such a way that even going to a friend's house yesterday was the first time for me… So, there's no one I liked or whatsoever. To die like this, I suddenly remembered…."

"Shut up. You won't die, so listen…"

But Mito continued to ignore him.

"I love you, Guren. Perhaps, you are my first love….."

"What perhaps! Say such things when you are safe, alive and fully conscious! How do you love someone when you die huh?"

"……."

"MITO!"

"……"

"Are you listening, MITO!"

"……I'm scared……Guren. I'm really scared….. the blood can't stop flowing."

"……."

"Enemies are everywhere."

"……."

"Goshi, Hanayori-san and Yukimi-san…..because they protected me….it's my fault…"

"……."

“The door is already forced open.”

“Calm down Mito. I’m on my way, wait a little while. It’s alright. I will save everyone. Calm down. Push on. Don’t give up……”

“Please don’t come. If you come….you too will….”

“Don’t fret unnecessarily. Before I arrive, you must defend yourselves in the audio-visual room at all costs.”

“Guren……”

“What?”

“Save me……”

Just then, an explosion could be heard from the other side of the phone. The call ended.

“Damn it…..”

Guren muttered.

“Damn it. Damn it. Damn it. Damn it. STOP JOKING!!”

He ignored the stares of those around him and shouted.

How dared he announce that he’ll go save everyone. He did not have enough power. No matter how much he talked about bravery and big ambitions, it didn’t matter to him. He did not possess such power and charisma.

To protect someone, to focus on protecting someone, he should have ran forwards earlier.

Yet, what was all this buffoonery? What exactly was……

“…….”

But at that time, he stopped thinking.

He found something unbelievable at the edge of his vision.

In a dark alley.

The engine of an ownerless motorcycle was running.

Beside the motorcycle–

A blade was inserted into the ground, standing upright.

Illuminated by the bright moonlight, a black blade was shining with evil beauty.

“…….”

It was the blade Mahiru was using just now.

The blade that injected the poison of the Oni into him.

The blade cursed with the <Kiju>.

Guren started at the sword.

Great power was standing before him.

Looking at the untouchable power before him, Guren felt tired.

How much longer can I tolerate being foolishly and pitifully played around by Mahiru before I give up?

He smiled at the sword.

“Ha, haha, hahahahaha……alright. I know, Mahiru. I give up. I’ll become the hare too. I’ll become an Oni too. But I am different from you. I give up my humanity because I don’t want to give up on everything.”

Afterwards, he called Kureto. The phone ringed once before he picked up.

“What?”

“Are you alright?”

“Ha. What’s this. Are you worrying about me? Where are you?”

Guren told him his location. When Mahiru decided on this place, he did a detailed search of the surrounding buildings and memorised them. Therefore, he gave an answer immediately.

Kureto replied.

“Ikejiri……? Why this address?”

Guren replied.

“I met up with Hiragi Mahiru.”

“…….And then?”

Kureto’s voice turned cold immediately.

“The person who killed the Hyakuya Sect was Mahiru.”

“So? No matter what we do now, the war cannot be stopped.”

“Indeed.”

“Then?”

“From now on, my body would have undergone Mahiru’s <Kiju>experimentation. I’m going to use this power to rescue everyone in school.”

“……”

“However, if I were to lose my conscience and become a mindless killing machine, then kill me. Regarding the information on the <Kiju>, it’s on the ground at the location I just told you. If it’s you, perhaps after looking at this, you could find a way to kill me.”

Kureto replied.

“What are you talking about? Who directed you to say this?”

“There’s no one directing me to say any of this. I’m only a powerless trash Ichinose. Also, in the current situation, there’s no one I could rely on apart from you. Thus, I beg you.”

“…..Why, trust me?”

Guren replied.

“Because you trusted me.”

“…….”

Kureto did not reply. But it was fine. He had said all he wanted to say. Let things progress as they would.

Just when Guren wanted to hang up, Kureto replied.

“……Understood. Let’s defeat the Hyakuya Sect together.”

Guren hung up.

He made another call to Shinya. It was picked up instantly.

“Guren? You are still alive?”

“Yeah. I need to tell you something.”

“Of course you have something to say. Under such circumstances……”

“I slept with Mahiru.”

Shinya went silent almost immediately. (note: LMAO 😂)

“…..Aye~. Are you gloating or what?”

“Are you angry?”

“……How do I put it. After all, the guy Mahiru loves is you…….but, since it’s like that…..the feeling of defeat is horrible. I wonder why?”

“Go ask a devil.”

“Haha, how does the success of your love all these years feel?”

“It felt like things couldn’t get any worse than this.” (note: LOL 😂)

“In other words…..I understand from the current situation. What next?”

“I accepted the <Kiju> and became an Oni.”

“Ha? Why?”

“Sayuri, Shigure, Mito and Goshi are currently in school, being attacked by the Hyakuya Sect.”

“Yeah.”

“I am going to rescue them.”

With regards to what Guren said, Shinya was at a loss for words. He sighed and said.

“…….You, are actually an idiot right?”

Guren could find no reasons to deny that. He said nothing. Shinya continued.

“……So, why call me?”

Guren said.

“…….If I die, I’ll leave Mahiru to you.”

“Does that mean you want me to kill her or to marry her?”

Guren hung up. There’s nothing left to say.

Guren looked at the <Kiju> blade inserted into the ground. Before, when he took it, the Oni

would grab the opportunity to invade his body, and he had no power to resist.

It could be the same this time round.

To take up this blade meant to give up on being human. But, no matter what, power was needed.

There was no choice, power was key. There was no time to hesitate.

Guren recalled what Mahiru said earlier on.

“How old are we now?”

Sixteen.

At age sixteen, he was no longer a human.

But at the same time, he had no more worries.

And no more doubts.

As such, if he could save someone. Even if he was a worthless piece of trash, if he could save his comrades, he could still walk forward happily.

“Save Mito. Save Goshi. Save Sayuri. Save Shigure.”

Guren kept looking at the <Kiju> blade inserted into the ground, muttering as if to persuade himself.

“…….I am different from Mahiru. I give up on being a human because I want to save my comrades…….”

He took the blade.

At that instant, darkness permeated his vision.

Pitch black.

Endless darkness attacked—

From that moment onwards, Guren Ichinose’s catastrophe at age sixteen began.

Volume 3 Afterword

This is volume three of Owari no Seraph light novel!

This time, things have evolved into an incredible situation, how does everyone feel about it?

The people who have played around, destroying the world in the process.

Guren, Kureto, Shinya, Mahiru, Shinoa, what will happen to everyone at First Shibuya High School?

And, how is it connected to the collapsed world in the comics?

Stay tuned!

Incidentally this time, I was asked to write 3 pages of the afterword. But then I got a call from my supervisor.

Supervisor: Kagami-san, have you written the afterword?

Me: I haven't! I'm so sorry! I'm always so late about it!

Supervisor: No no, it's good that you're late this time. Yamamoto-san said that wants to draw a few scenes, so he's thinking of drawing another page……!?

Me: OOOOOOOOOOOOH! You mean we'll have 11 drawings? That's great! Which scene is it?

This time, we have one more black-and-white illustration!

Then, for that scene, everyone please use your imagination!

So anyway! Yamamoto-sensei's sketches are really amazing!

My sketches are also amazing!

But we both love《Owari no Seraph》, so we will work hard this year!

So everyone, please look forward to it!